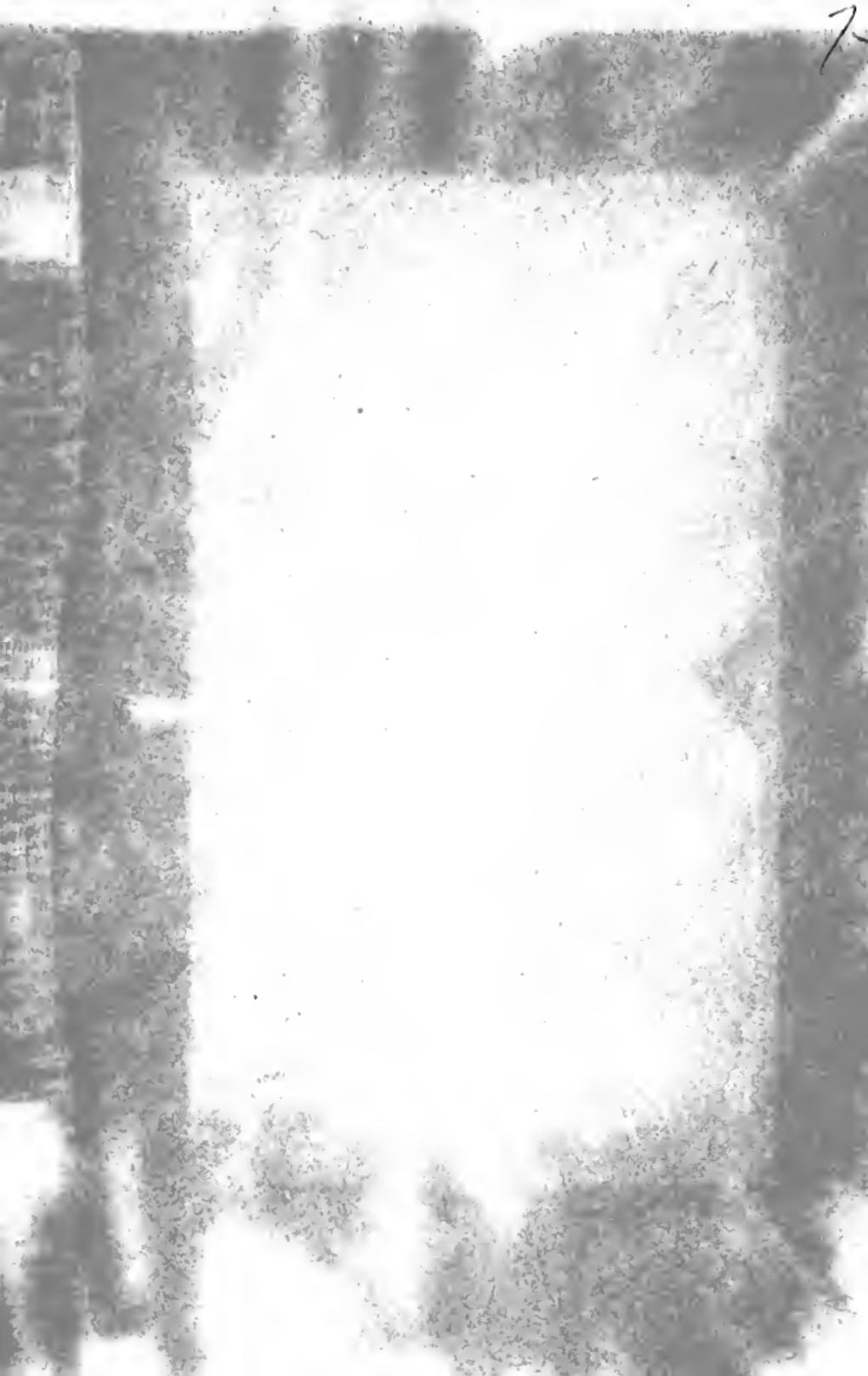




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BY MAURICE MAETERLINCK

Translated by ALFRED SUTRO

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IN FIVE ACTS
BY MAURICE
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BY ALFRED
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WITH AN
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BY J. W.
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INTRODUCTION

IN the remarkable volume of essays which M. Maeterlinck published last year, a sentence occurs which might be taken as the text of a discourse upon his whole dramatic work and method. *Les hommes*, he says, *ont je ne sais quelle peur étrange de la beauté*. The drama, of which an English rendering is given in this volume, is the latest of a series of plays in which, with continually increasing power and subtlety, he has attempted to disengage the inner beauty that lies deep at the heart of life itself. The romantic drama, with all its large possibilities of treatment, has shrunk, except now and then in the hands of its greatest masters, from the deepest expression of this spiritual beauty. Where we feel most, we are often most shy of saying all we mean; and to express such feelings in language that is at

once adequate and sincere, implies skill and courage of no ordinary degree. M. Maeterlinck is widely known as the inventor of a dramatic method which, with certain obvious imperfections, is vivid, flexible, far-reaching. It is still more important to recognise that this method is the vehicle of a new and strange sense of duty.

This newness, this strangeness of beauty, is what is meant by the word romance; and it is by comparison with other movements of the romantic spirit that it may best be appreciated in its real meaning. Being of the nature of a new sense, and only incidentally of a new method of expression, it does not appear at once in definite forms. It may even wander about from art to art, seeking for means of outlet. The analogy which certainly exists between M. Maeterlinck's dramatic pieces and the painting of his distinguished countryman, M. Fernand Khnopff, may be traced back to a common impulse — that of expressing, by such means as the existing arts supply or suggest, the inner meaning and hidden beauty

of things as they are freshly felt by a mind which approaches them quite courageously and quite simply.

The new romantic movement in Belgium has a close historical relation to the great romantic movement of France proper, the influence of which after sixty years still remains unexhausted. But it also—as the Belgian critics themselves point out—has been deeply influenced by England. The direct study of the Elizabethan drama has had an obvious effect on these plays in choice of method and inspiration of subject. And another English influence is not less certain or less powerful—that of the romantic movement which originated, some forty years ago, among an obscure group of Oxford undergraduates, and which has since effected so great a change, not only in specific arts like poetry and painting, but in the serious daily thought of mankind with regard to beauty.

La Princesse Maleine, the earliest and by far the crudest and most fantastic of the plays, is also the one which shows the Elizabethan

influence in its most direct action and at its highest force. The new thrill which all romantic movements seek is attained in it by the element of undefined supernatural suggestion, which gives *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* their unique horror, and which is used with an inferior, but scarcely more imitable magic by Shakespeare's great successors. The masterpieces of post-Shakespearean tragedy are now familiar beyond England. M. Maeterlinck himself has adapted '*Tis Pity She's a Whore*' for production on the French stage. Another writer in *La Jeune Belgique*, M. Georges Eeckhoud, has executed an able translation of the *Duchess of Malfy*, that ill-proportioned and fantastic play, which rises in its fourth and fifth acts to a tragic tension unequalled but in Shakespeare, and to a splendour of phrase that here and there might be Shakespeare's own in his greatest scenes. To the same influence, in its first overmastering and intoxicating effect, may no doubt be ascribed the morbid overstrain, the piling of horror upon horror till the final effect, instead of the tragic calm, is a kind of

exhausted stupor, which is no less marked in *La Princesse Maleine* than in the masterpieces of Ford and Webster.

In the two mystery plays—for they should hardly be called dramas—of *L'Intruse* and *Les Aveugles*, the fantastic element, the tragic delirium of the earlier piece was exchanged for a graver, more equable treatment, and for a more or less definite symbolism. The two methods were to a certain extent combined, not perhaps with the most felicitous result, in *Les Sept Princesses*, which followed after a short interval. In these pieces action is reduced to the simplest and most abstract limits. There are, so to speak, the raw stuff, unfixed and unshaped, of a spiritual drama. It is worth noting that in none of them have the persons—if these can be called persons who are rather half-impersonate thoughts or emotions—any names. They flicker on the verge of embodiment, like a flame in the doorway. *Le Roi*, *Le Prêtre*, *La Sœur de Charité*, *La Plus Vieille Aveugle*—such are the titles of the articulate phantoms in these spectral plays;

hollow masks shaped into a sort of human likeness, and seen like lights in a blur of mist. It is as though the bodiless ghost of a drama passed before us. In *Les Aveugles*, by much the most remarkable of the three, this method is carried to its most uncompromising conclusions, with a weirdness of effect to which it would not be easy to find a parallel. There is absolutely no action. All the persons who speak at all speak by hints, by touches, by half-frozen whispers, scarcely more articulate than the rustle of the dead leaves about them. The terror which grows throughout it is a terror of silence and darkness felt as active presences. The tension of mere situation is so great that the barking of a dog—like the knocking at the gate in the central scene of *Macbeth*—becomes more than the nerves can bear. When at last one of the figures, speechless till then, breaks out into loud weeping, the curtain falls as inevitably on the stoppage of the silence as in an ordinary play it falls on the stoppage of the speech. It would be but a step further to a

drama in which the actors should be not only blind, but dumb.

Motion, philosophy will tell us, is relative; and reaction, in the spiritual as well as in the material world, the exact equivalent of action. The principle that the highest tragic effect may result from mere passiveness is one which has its instances in the great dramatists. In the *Niobe* of Æschylus, Niobe herself sat silent and motionless throughout, like a stone, while wave after wave of calamity surged up and eddied off round her feet. The prodigious effect produced by this dumb figure can be dimly guessed from what is known of the lost play. In the familiar instance of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the unique dramatic thrill is not in spite of, but directly due to, the inertness of Hamlet himself, until the single wild spasm of half-unconscious action, in which the "woe and wonder" of the last scene flare out for a moment and then as suddenly sink away. The Belgian Shakespeare — as M. Maeterlinck has been called in a phrase which was originally meant seriously,

and which at least indicates what an effect his dramatic work had on the minds which it threw into sympathetic vibration—carried this principle almost to the extent of a new dramatic method.

Of a piece with this artifice of structure is the artifice of style in the reiteration and repercussion of phrases, which is one of their most obvious features. In his later plays it is used with extraordinary delicacy and adroitness; in these it has an effect which is now and then almost childish, and often undeniably odd. But in both alike it represents an attempt, no less daring than simple, to use language beyond its normal sphere, so as to produce the emotional effect of music. "All art," as has been said by a great English master of criticism, one who had no strange fear of beauty, "constantly aspires towards the condition of music": and in music nothing happens.

In these earlier plays, through which he first arrested the attention of the world, and by which (as the first impression is usually

the strongest) he is perhaps still more widely known, M. Maeterlinck invented, one might almost say, certainly moulded to a very distinct and individual form and use, a dramatic method, subtle, vivid, fantastic, going curiously near to the inner life and heart of things. They touched the springs of pity and terror with extraordinary power. They showed delicate insight, romantic feeling, dramatic force of a high order. They showed a power over language which was akin to a real creative gift. Their faults were no less obvious. They were those indicated once for all, in words unapproachable for their delicate accuracy, by Keats in his famous preface to *Endymion*: “great inexperience, immaturity, and every error denoting a feverish attempt rather than a deed accomplished.” “The imagination of a boy is healthy”—one can hardly forbear going on with the immortal words—“and the mature imagination of a man is healthy; but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain.” The

faculty of design, the certain control of beauty, were still to come. But come they did. M. Maeterlinck did not reply—probably did not listen—to the murmurings of dislike, of ridicule, of half-uneasy contempt with which a large number of his critics met him; his answer was the production, early in 1892, of another romantic drama, *Pelléas et Mélisande*.

Of this play, all but faultless in its construction, more than faultless in its beauty, it is difficult to speak with tempered praise, or in words that shall not seem extravagant. In virtue of mere beauty it stands among the masterpieces of literature. All the qualities of the earlier plays are disengaged from their defects. The morbid tone has disappeared; the fantastic element is under control. The symbolism is set back to its proper plane. In the crude form in which it is an uncomfortable quality at best, it only remains in the brief and curiously exciting prologue. The story is one of quite human beauty and sorrow. Pelléas, Golaud, the young wife, the aged king, are no phantasmal types, no reminiscences of some mediæval portrait gallery.

The finding of Mélisande, by the well in the wood, out of which, like an Undine, she might almost be fancied to have arisen, is the only concession made to the purely fantastic side of romance. But it is needless to insist upon the skill with which it is worked into the structure of the play, or the extraordinary force which it adds to the final scene, with its wild spiritual beauty—*elle est née sans raison, pour mourir, et elle meurt sans raison*—“she came like water, and like wind she goes.”

The advance in matured power is equally visible in the management of the language. *Il n'y a guère* (to quote again from M. Maeterlinck the critic) *que les paroles qui semblent d'abord inutiles qui comptent dans une œuvre.* In this somewhat paradoxical expression one may recognise the restatement of an old truth; that in imaginative literature of a high order the suggestion of the words is always more, and may be quite infinitely more, than their expression. It is this indefinable and incalculable power of suggestion which gives poetry its romantic or magical note. Language at a high tension may
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obtain a value and a power of which it is impossible to give any reasoned account, and which lies partly in the mere poise and cadence of syllables, partly in the fact that the thought or emotion which passes alive into the words does not die there, but keeps in them some of its own vital energy. In this play the language is severely and almost nakedly simple. Even the rare metaphors are introduced in the most curiously tentative way, as of a person handling money in a strange currency. *On dirait par moments, qui il y a cent ans que je ne l'ai plus vue*—the timid, laboured expression, with its dragging syllables, is that of one to whom words are still something magical. Its troubled beauty lies poles apart from the facile rhetoric of the traditional drama.

The use of language to produce the emotional effect of music, which has been noticed as a distinctive quality of M. Maeterlinck's work, is carried here to a much higher degree of perfection. The echoes and repetitions of phrase are used with increased skill, more accurately judged and wrought in a freer and larger pattern. It

is well known that the structure of Athenian literature, the demand which it made on the perceptions of its readers, was both in prose and verse immensely more complex than that of ours. In this play the elaboration of the language, notwithstanding its limpid clearness, is commensurate with that of a Greek chorus. As in an ode of Pindar, assonances and keywords lie pages apart and only give themselves up to minute observation. In one, and that perhaps the most beautiful instance, the echo reaches over more than half the play; nor is there anything in Shakespeare himself more poignant than those words heard by the noon-day fountain, and faintly repeated in the last scene by the girl's dying lips.

Nor is the dramatic skill less striking than the finished beauty of the language: and among those who saw it performed in London in the summer of 1894, by M. Lugné-Poe and his company, there seems to be only one opinion as to the unusual scenic effectiveness. It would seem to be the only one of M. Maeterlinck's plays in which he has chosen to comply rigorously with

the conditions of the modern stage. The three dramatic pieces which appeared in a later volume are significantly described on the title-page as *Petits Drames pour Marionnettes*, and revert, though with an increased power and sureness of touch, to the mystical or symbolic treatment of his earlier works.

It is in this later group of plays that the second great English influence which affected M. Maeterlinck's work appears in its full force : that of the Arthurian legend as interpreted anew by the individual genius of two great English artists and thinkers. The number of names transferred or adapted in these plays from the story of the Round Table is only one indication of this influence ; Pélleas, Ygraine, Palomides, Tintagiles, all come saturated with the associations of the *Mort d'Arthur*. The Pre-Raphaelite movements in poetry and in painting are alike expressions of a certain Pre-Raphaelitism of thought which on its more imaginative side turns to that story, the fine flower of mediæval romance, as to its natural home. The combination in these plays of an unusual directness of

thought and straightforwardness of expression with a troubled brooding, a pervading sense of some unexpressed romantic or spiritual beauty, may remind one sometimes of the early poetry and prose of Mr. Morris himself. In *The Hollow Land* there is a wonderful passage in which the artifice of repetition is used exactly as M. Maeterlinck uses it, with an effect of magical magnificence, and it is certainly significant that the author of *Rapunzel* and *The Defence of Guenevere*, who seldom could be induced to take much interest in a new author, and seldom still in a new dramatist, gave to *Pelléas et Mélisande* the tribute of a praise as high as it was rare.

But even here the contrast is as striking as the analogy. In the work of the English poet, the outward world is dwelt upon with the utmost keenness of observation, and an almost physical delight in description. He had the eye that at a single glance takes in everything "from the snail on the wall to the setting sun," and the acute joy of the bodily senses that can never have enough of definite form and colour: that lingers delightedly over the specks of white

in a painted book, the surface of wet slates under torchlight, the folds of drapery, the curves of armour. In combined sensitiveness to impression and power of observation he is almost unequalled: and there is perhaps no other poet of the first rank who leaves so little to mere suggestion, in whom the actual expression of the meaning he would convey is so frank, explicit, and complete. M. Maeterlinck is acutely sensitive, but one does not gather from the plays that he is specially observant. With him, suggestion is nearly everything. The physical surroundings of life are reduced to a series of formal, repeatable, and sometimes almost abstract symbols: and it is on the inner world, the still depths of the human soul, that he concentrates his interest. The "sad sick sunflowers" of *A Good Knight in Prison* are the projection, upon the vividly seen and felt outer world, of a certain mood of mind: how like in tone, how totally different in means of expression, is the wonderful *Je crois que mes mains sont malades aujourd'hui* of the Princess Mélisande!

Almost from the first, M. Maeterlinck seems to have arrived at definite notions as to the stock of scenery which would be sufficient for his stage; and he brings pieces of it out again, when they are needed, with the utmost non-chalance. An admirer of his has been heard to say that "he was sick of that tower" when it reappeared once more in *Aglavaine et Sélysette*. In *La Princesse Maleine*, the scene was definitely placed in the Netherlands, the greater part of it at the castle of Ysselmonde, among the languid tides and fever-stricken estuaries of the Meuse. In the other plays no place or country is definitely indicated. There are features in the scenery which convey suggestions of Ghent and the author's home near the great canal of Terneuse; of the threading waterways of that forlorn-looking city, its three hundred bridges, its huge prison, the two great asylums for the blind and dumb, the little dreamy world of the Béguinage. In such surroundings *Les Aveugles* and *La Mort de Tintagiles* might not unnaturally frame themselves. But through all the plays something

of the same atmosphere may be felt as a faintly indicated background: old thinly inhabited castles, terraced and moated; trailing canals; trees in long files and avenues; a tower in the middle of a wood, haunted by sea-fowl from the bordering ocean; curtain-like draperies of cloud off a low coast; silent pools suddenly startled by the beating of swans' wings in the dusk. Beyond all, we feel the perpetual presence of water; tinkling from a fountain in the middle of a wood, sounding dully in vaults under ground, washing against terraced cliffs and sea-caverns, shining in flat spaces of dull silver, running before the wind in little green waves, ubiquitous, infiltrating, all-surrounding, as though the solid earth itself might melt into it. Nor is he ever tired of strange, variable effects of light: the gleam over sheets of water, skies thick-sown with stars, fire in the dusk, lamplight from indoors striking suddenly out of a window on green boughs of trees.

For the play which is here presented in an English dress no special words of preface are required. It may be left to make its own

impression. Some of its indefinable charm of language must no doubt be lost in a translation; and the rounded completeness of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, the finished repose in which it ends, are scarcely rivalled here. *Aglavaine et Sélysette* ends on a cry, haunting, indeed, but not satisfying. In the *Trésor des Humbles* M. Maeterlinck appeared as a professed Neo-Platonist, a thinker and mystic, saturated in Emerson, and finding inspiration from Plotinus and Swedenborg. This growing philosophic passion may involve a certain expense of dramatic quality. But there is here an even higher attainment in delicate insight, and in the power of expressing by simple words some of the subtlest and most elusive shades of emotion.

It has little interplay of action. The invention of the third actor, as Aristotle notes, was the capital point in the development of the drama. Here there are in effect only two. Beyond Aglavaine and Sélysette themselves there are really no characters. It is this which places it in dramatic quality on a different

plane from *Pelléas et Mélisande*, with its subtle and masterly interaction of three forces. Here Méléandre only stands still while the two great forces are at their work. He and Méligrane are not so much persons as necessary dramatic symbols—one might say, a part of the scenery in its largest sense; and Yssaline (unlike the child Yniold in *Pelléas et Mélisande*, who takes a definite part in the evolution of the tragedy) is merely a way of obtaining more vivid and heightened expression for one side of Sélysette. But praise cannot be too high for the fineness and truth of the two principal figures; nor for the consummate skill with which the interest, the sympathy, the beauty are slowly slid from one to the other, as Sélysette unfolds larger and larger, until she blots out her brilliant rival. Nor, given the story with its two actors, is there any inferiority in its dramatic handling. One point beyond all deserves special notice. The artifice of repetition, already applied with such subtle skill to language, is here extended with wonderful effect to action. The doubling of the scene on the tower in the fourth act, led

up to by the doubled meeting in the corridor, brings the action itself towards the condition of music. A situation which, abstractly stated, is commonplace to the verge of sordidness, has been subtilised into profound meaning and triumphant beauty.

This inner beauty of human life, of which M. Maeterlinck is so curious and subtle an interpreter, is also its inner truth. *Haec omnia in figura contingebant illis: scripta sunt autem ad correptionem nostram, in quos fines seculorum devenerunt.* We live in a period rich almost beyond parallel in accumulated treasures of beauty, produced by the great artists and thinkers of Western Europe during the last hundred years. But it is only from living art of its own that any age can draw real life. It relieves the darkness of our outlook to see, amid the triumph of an ugliness that grows day by day more insolent, more elaborate, more all-persuasive, the unconquerable resurgence of beauty—*la domination d'une âme qui se laisse être belle.*

J. W. MACKAIL.



AGLAUAINÉ AND SELYSETTE

Translated by Alfred Sutro



PERSONS OF THE PLAY

MELEANDER.

AGLAVAIN.

SELYSETTE.

MELIGRANE (SELYSETTE's *grandmother*).

LITTLE YSSALINE (SELYSETTE's *sister*).

AGLAVAINE & SELYSETTE

ACT FIRST

A Room in the Castle.

MELIGRANE is asleep on a high-backed chair at the far end of the room. Enter MELEANDER and SELYSETTE.

MELEANDER.

I will read you Aglavaine's letter : " Do not go out to meet me. Wait for me in the room wherein you linger, every evening,—and thus I shall not come upon you as a stranger. It is as I leave the boat that has brought me to you that I write these lines. Our crossing was very calm and beautiful, but, when I landed, I found the roads all sodden with rain ; and the sun will probably have set ere I behold the towers of the old castle where our good Selysette has offered shelter to her brother's widow. . . .

SELYSETTE.

[Clapping her hands.] Oh ! the sun is setting ! . . . Look !—she must be near at hand. . . . I will see whether

MELEANDER.

[*Staying her with a gesture, and continuing to read.*] ". . . I have only seen you once, Meleander, and it was in the midst of the confusion and distraction of my wedding—my poor wedding, alas ! where we beheld not the guest none ever invite, who yet always usurps the seat of the happiness we look for. Only once have I seen you, and more than three years have passed since then ; but I come to you as confidently as though we two had known each other from infancy, and had been rocked to sleep in the same cradle. . . .

SELYSETTE.

[*Turning round.*] Oh ! Grandam is still asleep ! . . . Ought we to wake her when Aglavaine comes ? . . .

MELEANDER.

Yes, it is her wish. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Her eyes are almost hidden beneath her white hair. . . . She is not happy to-night. . . . Oh ! I want to kiss her. . . .

MELEANDER.

Be careful you do not wake her too soon. . . .

[*He continues to read.*] "And, coming to you, I know full well that it is as a brother you will greet me ! . . . We said but little to each other, and yet the few words you spoke to me were different from all those I had heard till then. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Do not read so quickly. . . .

MELEANDER.

[*Reading.*] ". . . And besides, I look forward so eagerly to taking Selysette in my arms! . . . She must be good, she must be beautiful, since she loves you and has your love. I feel that I shall love her much more than you ever can, for I know how to give more love; I have been unhappy. . . . And now, I am glad to have suffered; I shall be able to share with you all that sorrow brings us. There are times when I think that the tribute I have paid may well suffice for the three of us; that destiny can have no further claim upon us, and that we may look forward to a marvellous life. We shall seek happiness, and naught beside. We shall so fill ourselves, and all around us, with beauty, that there will no longer be room for sorrow or misfortune; and, would these none the less force their entrance, needs must they too become beautiful before they dare knock at our door."

[*A door opens. Enter little YSSALINE.*

YSSALINE.

I have the key, little sister, I have the key! . . .

MELEANDER.

What key?

SELYSETTE.

The key of the old tower.

MELEANDER.

I thought it was lost. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I have had another one made.

MELEANDER.

I hope you will lose that one too.

SELYSETTE.

[Examining the key.] Oh ! how large it is ! . . .
It does not look like the one I lost.

YSSALINE.

I was there, little sister, when they tried it. . . .
They opened the door three times, then they shut
it again. . . . It fits much better than the other
key, which was all rusty. . . . But it was hard to
close the last time, because of the wind, which was
pushing from the other side. . . . There is a great
wind to-night. You can hear the sea-gulls all
round the tower; and the doves too. . . . They
have not yet gone to sleep. . . .

SELYSETTE.

They are looking for me; they have not seen
me up there for a long time—two weeks and more.
. . . I will go to-morrow.

YSSALINE.

With me, little sister ?

SELYSETTE.

Yes, if you will go to bed at once; your nurse is waiting. . . . [YSSALINE goes.] She is beautiful? . . .

MELEANDER.

Who?

SELYSETTE.

Aglavaine.

MELEANDER.

Yes, very beautiful. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Whom is she like?

MELEANDER.

She is like no other woman. . . . Her beauty is different, that is all. . . . stranger and more ethereal; it is never the same—one might almost say it was more manifold. . . . it is a beauty along which the soul can pass unhindered. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I know I am not beautiful. . . .

MELEANDER.

You will never say that again, once she is here. It is impossible to say anything one does not believe, or that is useless, in her presence. Nothing can live near her that is not true. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Nothing can live near her that is not true. . . .

MELEANDER.

Selysette? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Meleander?

MELEANDER.

We have lived together for nearly four years,
have we not? . . .

SELYSETTE.

It will be four years, when the summer ends.

MELEANDER.

Nearly four years that you have been by my side, always beautiful, always tender and loving, and the soft smile on your lips revealed the deep happiness within. . . . Tell me, you have not shed many tears during these four years? At most some few little tears when a pet bird flew away, or your grandmother reproved you, or your favourite flowers died. But no sooner had the bird returned, or your grandmother forgiven you, than you came back into the room laughing merrily and leapt on my knee, kissing me like a little girl home from school. I think we may fairly claim to have been happy; and yet there are times when I wonder whether we have truly lived near enough to each other. . . . I know not whether it was I who lacked the patience to follow you, or you who fled too swiftly; but often, when I tried to speak to you as I spoke just now, you would seem to reply to me from the other end of the world, where reasons unknown to me had impelled you to seek

refuge. . . . I do not know why this is borne home to me so clearly this evening.—Is it because Aglavaine lives more freshly in my memory? Has her letter, the news of her arrival, already freed something in our soul?—You and I would seem to have loved each other as much as it is possible to love. But, when she is here, we shall love each other still more; we shall love each other differently, more deeply—you will see. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Love her if you will. I shall go away. . . .

MELEANDER.

Selysette! . . .

SELYSETTE.

I know that I cannot understand. . . .

MELEANDER.

You do understand, Selysette, and it is because I know that you understand, though you feign the contrary, that I speak to you of these things. . . . There are depths in your soul that you never reveal to me; nay, you take pleasure in hiding them. . . . Do not cry, Selysette, I am not reproaching you. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I was not crying. Wherefore should I cry?

MELEANDER.

And yet I can see that your lips are trembling. . . .

SELYSETTE.

My thoughts were far away. . . Is it true that she has been unhappy?

MELEANDER.

Yes, she has been unhappy on account of your brother. . .

SELYSETTE.

Perhaps she deserved to be. . .

MELEANDER.

I doubt whether a woman can ever deserve to be unhappy. . .

SELYSETTE.

What was it my brother did?

MELEANDER.

She begged me not to tell you. . .

SELYSETTE.

You have been writing to each other?

MELEANDER.

Yes; from time to time.

SELYSETTE.

You never told me.

MELEANDER.

When her letters came I have more than once shown them to you, but you did not seem anxious to read them. . .

SELYSETTE.

I don't remember. . .

MELEANDER.

But I remember it well. . .

SELYSETTE.

Where was it that you saw her for the last time?

MELEANDER.

Have I not told you I only saw her once? It was in the garden of your brother's castle. . . . With great trees spreading over us. . .

SELYSETTE.

In the evening?

MELEANDER.

Yes; in the evening.

SELYSETTE.

What did she say?

MELEANDER.

We said but little to each other. But we could see that the lives of both of us tended towards the same goal. . .

SELYSETTE.

Did you kiss each other?

MELEANDER.

When?

SELYSETTE.

On that evening. . .

MELEANDER.

Yes, when I went away. . .

SELYSETTE.

Ah!

MELEANDER.

I think she will stay but a short time with us,
Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no; I want her to stay. . . . [There is a noise outside.] There she is! [She runs to the window.] There are torches in the courtyard.

[A moment's silence. The great door opens and AGLAVAINE appears on the threshold. She comes in without saying a word, and stands in front of SELYSETTE, looking fixedly at her.

MELEANDER.

Will you not kiss each other?

AGLAVAINE.

Yes. [She presses a long kiss on SELYSETTE'S lips, then goes to MELEANDER, whom she kisses likewise.] And you too. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I must wake grandam. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

[*Looking at MELIGRANE.*] How profoundly she sleeps! . . .

MELEANDER.

She sleeps like this for many hours each day. . . . Her arms are paralysed. . . . Go close to her; she wishes to see you to-night. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

[*Taking MELIGRANE'S hand and bending over her.*] Grandmother! . . .

MELIGRANE.

[*Awaking.*] Selysette! . . . [She opens her eyes.] Oh! who are you?

AGLAVAINE.

Aglavaine. . . .

MELIGRANE.

I was startled. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

May I kiss you, grandmother?

MELIGRANE.

You call me grandmother? I cannot see you very well. . . . Who is that behind you?

SELYSETTE.

[*Coming forward.*] It is I, grandam.

MELIGRANE.

Ah! it is you, Selysette. . . . I could not see you. . . . Bring the lamp a little nearer, my child. . . .

[SELYSETTE brings a lamp, whose light falls on AGLAVAINE.]

MELIGRANE.

[Looking at AGLAVAINE.] Oh! you are beautiful! . . .

AGLAVAINE.

May I kiss you now, grandmother?

MELIGRANE.

No; do not kiss me to-night. . . . The pain is worse than usual. Selysette is the only one who can touch me without hurting.

AGLAVAINE.

That is what I want to learn, too—to touch without hurting. . . .

MELIGRANE.

Kiss me, Selysette, before I go to sleep again, and take away the lamp. . . . I was in the midst of a strange dream. . . .

SELYSETTE.

[Going back with the lamp.] You must forgive her; she suffers so much. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

What is there to forgive, Selysette? You have dropped something. . . . What is it that has fallen on the floor? [She picks up a key.] Oh! what a strange key! . . .

SELYSETTE.

It is the key of my tower. . . . You don't know all that it unlocks.

AGLAVAINE.

It is strange and heavy. . . . I, too, have brought a golden key; you shall see. . . . A key is the most beautiful of all things, so long as we do not know what it unlocks. . . .

SELYSETTE.

You shall know to-morrow. . . . Did you notice, as you came here, a very old tower, with its turret in ruins, at the far end of the castle?

AGLAVAINE.

Yes; I saw something that seemed to be crumbling beneath the sky. The stars shone through the crevices in the wall.

SELYSETTE.

Well, that is it; it is my tower—an old forsaken lighthouse. No one dare go up. . . . You have to traverse a long corridor, of which I found the key. But then I lost it again. . . . Now I have had another one made, for I am the only one who goes there. Sometimes I take Yssaline.

Meleander only went once; he felt giddy. It is very high—you will see. The ocean stretches before you. It foams all round the tower, except on the castle side. And all the birds of the sea live in the crevices of the walls. They send forth loud cries when they recognise me. There are hundreds of doves, too; people tried to drive them away, but they refuse to leave the tower. They always come back. . . . Are you tired?

AGLAVAINE.

Yes, a little, Selysette. I have had a long journey.

SELYSETTE.

Yes, of course. . . . We will go thither to-morrow; and besides, there is a strong wind to-night. . . .

[*A silence.*

MELEANDER.

It is strange, Aglavaine. . . . I had so much to tell you. . . . But in these first moments everything is still, and I feel as though there were something for which we were waiting.

AGLAVAINE.

| We are waiting for the silence to speak. . . .

MELEANDER.

What does it say to you?

AGLAVAINE.

It would not be the real silence, Meleander, were we able to repeat all that it tells us. . . .

We have exchanged a few, almost meaningless, words—words that any one could have spoken—and for all that, do we not feel at rest, do we not know that we have said things to each other that far outvalue our words? We have uttered the little timid words that strangers speak when they meet; and yet, who can tell all that has taken place between the three of us? Who can tell whether all that has to happen may not have been decided beneath one of these words? . . . But this much our silence has foretold to me: that I shall love Selysette like a little sister. . . . It cried that out to me, through all my soul, as I took my first step into the room; and it is the only voice that I have heard clearly. . . . [Drawing SELYSETTE to her.] Why is it, Selysette, that one has to love you so dearly, and that the unbidden tears flow forth as one kisses you? . . . [She presses a long kiss on her lips.] Come, you too, Meleander. . . . [She kisses him likewise.] It was perhaps this kiss for which we were all waiting, and it will be the seal of our silence for the night. . . .

[They go out.

ACT SECOND

SCENE I.—*A leafy grove in the park.*

AGLAVAINE and MELEANDER.

MELEANDER.

For five or six days only have we been living together under this roof, and already it seems to me that we must have spent our whole lives together; that I must have known you before I knew myself. All that I am appears to result from you; I am more conscious of your soul than of my own, you are nearer to me than all that is myself. . . . Were you not there I should no longer be conscious of myself; it is only in you that I can smile, only in you that I can love. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

So it is with me, too, Meleander. . . . Your least gesture reveals me to myself; there is not a smile, not a silence, not a word that comes from you but links me to a newer beauty. . . . I feel that I flower in you as you flower in me; and we are ever springing to birth again in each other. . . . Our souls speak to each other long before the words leave our lips.

MELEANDER.

The same world is within us, Aglavaine. God must have erred when He fashioned two souls out of our one. Where were you all these years of our life when neither of us knew of the other's existence ?

AGLAVAINE.

And you, Meleander, where were you, all these years that I have been waiting, in solitude? . . .

MELEANDER.

I was alone, too, and waiting, but hope had left me. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

I was alone and waiting, but had never ceased to hope. . . . Oh, there are times when I feel that it cannot be! . . .

MELEANDER.

I too, Aglavaine, and it frightens me. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Why should we be frightened? . . . We have found each other, what can there be to fear?

MELEANDER.

Is it not at the very moment of happiness that fear should come to us? . . . Is that not the most ominous time of all? for not a kiss is given but an enemy may be awakened . . . and besides there is something else. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

What ?

MELEANDER.

Selysette. . .

AGLAVAINE.

Well ?

MELEANDER.

Have you thought of Selysette ?

AGLAVAINE.

Yes.

MELEANDER.

And does that not trouble you ?

AGLAVAINE.

No, Meleander, it shall trouble me no more. . .

MELEANDER.

There may be sorrow in store for her. . .

AGLAVAINE.

Can I not love you like a brother, Meleander ?

MELEANDER.

But if her tears fall ? . .

AGLAVAINE.

Let her ascend with us, and her tears will soon cease to fall. . . Why should she not strive hand-in-hand with us towards the love that disdains the pettiness of love ? She is more beautiful than you believe, Meleander. We shall hold out our hands to her ; she will soon rejoin us, and then she will

weep no more. . . . And she will bless us for the tears she has shed, for some tears are sweeter than kisses. . . .

MELEANDER.

Do you believe I can love you like a sister,
Aglavaine?

AGLAVAIN.

Ah! . . .

MELEANDER.

Aglavaine, do you believe you can love me like
a brother?

AGLAVAIN.

Now that you have asked me, I no longer seem
to know, Meleander. . . .

MELEANDER.

I cannot believe it. We shall struggle day and night; we shall struggle for a long, long time; and all that is finest in us, all that might have turned into exquisite love, into beauty and deepest truth, will be exhausted in this futile effort. . . . And the more we struggle, the more shall we be conscious of a desire creeping up between our two souls like a heavy curtain. . . . And all that is best in us will perish, because of this desire. . . . It may seem to mean so little . . . and yet . . . is it not by the kiss we give that all things are transformed —stars and flowers, night and morning, thoughts and tears? . . . Is the immensity of the night as clear to the sister's eyes as it is to the woman who loves? Let us not bar the door to the most

beautiful of all truths, Aglavaine. . . . Let not all that is radiant in our two souls go break itself against one petty falsehood. . . You are not my sister, Aglavaine, and I cannot love you like a sister. . .

AGLAVAINE.

It is true that you are not my brother, Meleander; and it is here, doubtless, that suffering awaits us. . .

MELEANDER.

I know it, Aglavaine, but what can we do? . . .

AGLAVAINE.

It was destiny brought us together, Meleander. We recognised each other as perhaps two souls have never recognised each other before. We love; and henceforth nothing in the world can alter my love for you or yours for me. . .

MELEANDER.

That I believe, too, Aglavaine.—I see nothing in the world. . .

AGLAVAINE.

But if I brought sorrow to one who is innocent, would I be the same to you? . . .

MELEANDER.

If she be sorrowful, it will only be because she has not understood. . .

AGLAVAINE.

Tears are not less bitter because they should not fall. . .

MELEANDER.

There would be nothing left us but to fly from each other, Aglavaine ; yet that is impossible . . . So beautiful a thing was not born only to die ; and we have duties towards ourselves. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

I believe that too ; and I believe that there is something better to be done than to fly from each other. . . In the meanwhile, if suffering there must be, let that suffering be ours. . . .

MELEANDER.

[*Taking her in his arms.*] You are beautiful, Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVAINE.

[*Throwing her arms around him.*] I love you, Meleander. . .

[*They kiss each other. A cry of pain is heard, through the foliage, and SELYSETTE is seen, all dishevelled, flying towards the castle.*

MELEANDER.

Selysette ! . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Yes.

MELEANDER.

She has overheard us. . . She is flying to the castle. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

[*Pointing to SELYSETTE, who is already far away.*] Go after her ! . . . Go ! . . .

[*He rushes after SELYSETTE. AGLAVAINE leans against a tree and weeps silently.*]

SCENE II.—*In the depths of the park. AGLAVAINE is asleep on a bench, with a veil thrown round her head.*

Enter SELYSETTE.

SELYSETTE.

“Selysette, little Selysette, we must not let her cry.” . . . He pities me, because he no longer loves me. . . Neither do I love him any more. . . They fancy that I shall keep very quiet, and that all they have to do is to kiss me with their eyes turned away. . . “Selysette, little Selysette.” . . They say that very tenderly; oh, much more tenderly than they used to. . . When he kisses me now he dare not look at me, or, if he does, he seems to be begging forgiveness. . . And while they are embracing each other I must crouch away and hide, as though I had stolen something. . . They have gone out again to-night, and I have lost sight of them. . . “Little Selysette” is not in the secret . . . we always smile when

we speak to her . . . we kiss her on the forehead . . . and bring her flowers and fruit. . . The stranger takes "little Selysette" under her wing . . . and we cry when we kiss her, and say, "Poor little thing . . . there is nothing to be done. . . . She will not go away . . . but at least she shall not see anything" . . . and when her head is turned we take each other by the hand . . . yes, yes, till the time comes . . . only wait, wait. . . . "Little Selysette" will have her day too. . . . She does not yet quite know what she ought to do, but wait a little . . . we shall see. . . [Perceiving AGLAVAINE on the bench.] There they are! . . . Asleep in each other's arms! . . . Oh! this! this! . . . I must . . . Yssaline! Grandam! . . . They must see . . . they must see this! . . . There is no one coming! . . . I am alone, always. . . . I will . . . [Going closer.] She is alone, too . . . was it a ray of the moon or her white veil? Perhaps . . . She is asleep. What shall I do? . . . Oh, she doesn't know! . . . She is on the brink of the well; a sudden turn and she would fall in. . . . It has been raining . . . she threw her veil over her head, but her bosom is bare . . . she is wet through . . . how cold she must be . . . this country is strange to her. . . . Oh, how she trembles in her sleep! . . . I will put my cloak around her . . . [She covers AGLAVAINE up and lifts the veil that hides her face.] How deep is this sleep of hers! . . . She looks as though she had been crying . . . she does not seem happy . . . she seems no happier than I

... How pale she is; she is crying too, I see. . . . She is beautiful. . . . She is even more beautiful when she is so pale. . . . she seems to blend with the light of the moon. . . . I must wake her gently. . . . she might be frightened and fall into the well. . . . [Bending tenderly over her.] Aglavaine. . . . Aglavaine. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

[Waking]. Ah! . . . how light it is. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Be careful. . . . you are on the edge. . . . Don't turn round, you would be giddy. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Where am I?

SELYSETTE.

By the side of the castle well. Did you not know? . . . You should not come here alone. One has to be very careful; this spot is dangerous. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

I did not know. . . . it was so dark. . . . I saw the boxwood hedge, and a bench. . . . I was weary, and sad. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Are you cold? Draw the cloak around you. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Whose cloak is this? Yours, Selysette? You put it over me while I was sleeping? You must be cold too. . . . Come hither, let me wrap

it round you too. . . . You are trembling more than I. . . . [Turning round.] Oh! . . . Now that the moon has risen I can see the glimmer of the water between the walls. . . . If I had moved . . . and it is you. . . . [She throws a long look at SELYSETTE and puts her arms around her.] Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Let us not stay here. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

We should never resist moments such as these, Selysette. . . . They do not come a second time. . . . I have seen your soul, Selysette, for just now you loved me, though it was against your will. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Let us go, Aglavaine . . . there is fever about this place. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

I beseech you, Selysette, do not try to escape me at the very moment when all that is deepest in you is striving towards me. . . . Do you think we shall ever be nearer to each other? . . . Shall we allow little childish words, little words that are as thorns, to steal between these poor hearts of ours? . . . Come close to me, Selysette, come close to me in the night and let my arms enfold you; and it matters not though you find no words. . . . Something is speaking within you, and I hear it as you hear it. . . .

SELYSETTE.

[*Bursting into tears.*] Aglavaine. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Aglavaine's tears are falling too, Selysette. . . . She is weeping because she too is ignorant of the thing that should be done, the thing that should be said. . . . We are alone here, my poor Selysette; we two are all alone here in the darkness, clinging close to each other . . . and the happiness or unhappiness that must befall is being decided within us, at this very moment, perhaps. . . . But what is to be none can tell. And I have only my tears with which to question the future. I held myself the wiser of the two, but now that the moment has come that calls for wisdom I feel that my need of you is greater than your need of me. And therefore do my tears flow, Selysette, and therefore do I press my lips upon yours, so that we two may be as near as we possibly can to that which is being decided in the depths of us. I hurt you sorely this morning. . . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no; you did not hurt me. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

I hurt you sorely this morning, and my one desire is never to hurt you again. But how can we help giving pain to those we love most? . . .

SELYSETTE.

[*Sobbing.*] Aglavaine!

AGLAVAINE.

What is it, Selysette? You are trembling.

SELYSETTE.

It was the first time I had seen you asleep. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

You will often see me asleep, Selysette.

SELYSETTE.

And no one had ever told me anything. . . .
No one, no one!

AGLAVAINE.

Yes, yes, my poor Selysette, they will doubtless have told you the things they tell to all. But you had not yet learned to listen. . . .

SELYSETTE.

It was not the same thing. . . . Never, never. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Because you did not listen, Selysette; and look you, it is not only the ear that listens; and the things that I am saying to you now have not been truly heard save by your heart alone, and your heart has flung the words aside, and gathered only that I love you. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I love you, too. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

And therefore have you listened to me, and understood so well all that I cannot say. It is not only our hands that are joined at this moment, my poor Selysette. . . . But Meleander loves you too. Why would you not listen to him? . . .

SELYSETTE.

He is not like you, Aglavaine. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

He is better than I; and more than once must he have spoken to you far more wisely than I could speak. . . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no! it is not the same thing. . . . Listen, I cannot quite explain what I mean. When he is there I hide within myself. . . . I keep back my tears. . . . I do not want him to think I understand. . . . My love is too great. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Say on, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE.

It is so difficult. . . . You will never understand, and I know not how to tell you. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Though I fail to understand your words, I shall know what your tears are saying. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Well, there it is, Aglavaine. . . . I do not want him to love me for anything else. . . . I want him to love me because it is I. . . . Oh, it is impossible to say quite what I mean! . . . I do not want him to love me because I agree with him, or because I can answer him. . . . It is as though I were jealous of myself. Can you understand a little, Aglavaine?

AGLAVAINE.

When we look into a crystal vase we can soon tell whether there be pure water within, Selysette. . . . You were afraid lest he should see how beautiful you are. . . . This fear comes often to those who love, and know not why they fear. . . . We are too anxious, perhaps, that the others should divine. . . . And it is a fear that should be overcome. . . . For look you, Selysette, by dint of hiding from others the self that is in us, we may end by being unable to find it ourselves. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I know I am not wise, Aglavaine. . . . I would have him love me, even though I knew nothing, though I did nothing, though I saw nothing, though I were nothing. . . . I feel that I would have him love me though I no longer existed. . . .

And so I hid, I hid. . . . I wanted to keep everything hidden. . . . It is not his fault, Aglavaine. . . . And so I was glad when he shrugged his shoulders or shook his head as he kissed me . . . much happier than when he admired me. . . . But I suppose I am wrong in wishing to be loved like this? . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Who can tell how we should love, Selysette? . . . Some love one way, some another; love does this or that, and it is always well, because it is love. . . . In the very heart of us have we built love's cage, and we eye it as we would a vulture or strange eagle. . . . The cage is ours, but the bird belongs to none. . . . There is nothing in the world that is further from us than our love, my poor Selysette. Needs must we wait, and try to understand. . . .

SELYSETTE.

You love him, Aglavaine?

AGLAVAINE.

Whom, Selysette?

SELYSETTE.

Meleander. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

How can I help loving him?

SELYSETTE.

But do you love him as I love him?

AGLAVAINE.

I try to love him as I love you, Selysette.

SELYSETTE.

But if your love for him became too great? . . .

AGLAVAINE.

I do not think one's love can ever be too great.

SELYSETTE.

But if he loved you more than he loves me?

AGLAVAINE.

He will love in you what he loved in me, for it is all one. . . . There is not a creature in the world so like to me as Meleander. How could he not love you, seeing that I love you? And how could I love you if he did not? He would no longer be like himself, or like me. . . .

SELYSETTE.

There is nothing in me that he can love, and you know so much that I shall never know. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Ah, Selysette, believe me when I tell you that all my knowledge may well be worth no more than what you deem your ignorance. . . . I shall show him that you are more beautiful than he thought, that your feelings lie far deeper too. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Can you bring about that he will still love me when you are there?

AGLAVAIN.

Were he no longer to love you because of my being here, I would go away at once, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I will not let you go away. . . .

AGLAVAIN.

And yet that would have to be, for I should no longer love. . . .

SELYSETTE.

It would make me very unhappy, Aglavaine. . . . Oh, I am beginning to love you, to love you! . . .

AGLAVAIN.

I have loved you a long time. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I have not; and when I first saw you I did not love you, though I loved you all the same. . . . There was a moment when I wanted . . . oh! wicked things, very wicked. . . . But I did not know that you were like this. I should have been wicked had I been you. . . .

AGLAVAIN.

No, no, Selysette . . . in your real self you would never have been wicked, but, being

unhappy, you would not have known how to be good. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I should like to kiss you again, Aglavaine. . . . It is strange ; at first I could not kiss you. . . . Oh ! I was afraid of your lips . . . I know not why . . . and now. . . . Does he often kiss you ?

AGLAVAINE.

He ?

SELYSETTE.

Yes.

AGLAVAINE.

Yes, Selysette, and I kiss him too.

SELYSETTE.

Why ?

AGLAVAINE.

Because there are things that only a kiss can tell. . . . Because it is perhaps only when summoned by a kiss that all that is deepest and purest issues forth from our soul. . . .

SELYSETTE.

You can kiss him when I am there, Aglavaine. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

If you wish it I will never kiss him again.

SELYSETTE.

[*Suddenly bursting into tears.*] And you can kiss him when I am not there. . . . I am glad I awakened you, Aglavaine. . . .

[*She leans on AGLAVAINE'S shoulder and sobs softly.*]

AGLAVAINE.

I am glad I awakened you, Selysette. . . . Come, let us go. . . . It is well not to linger too long in a spot where one's soul has been happier than a human soul may be. . . .

[*They go out together with their arms about each other.*

SCENE III.—*A room in the castle.*

MELIGRANE and SELYSETTE are at the far end in the shadow.

MELIGRANE.

It is too much for you, my poor Selysette, say what you will. . . . You shake your head, but at this very moment you are wiping away your tears. . . .

SELYSETTE.

But, grandam, have I not told you that it is only because I am happy that my tears flow? . . .

MELIGRANE.

When people are happy they do not cry like that. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Oh yes, they must; otherwise, why should I be crying? . . .

MELIGRANE.

Listen to me, Selysette. . . . Just now I heard all you had to tell me about Aglavaine. I cannot

speak as she does. I am an old woman who knows but little, yet I have suffered, too, and you are all I have in the world. . . There are truths in these things, let me tell you, that may, perhaps, not be as beautiful as those whereof Aglavaine speaks ; but it is not always the most beautiful truths that are right, and the oldest and simplest that are wrong. . . One thing is very clear to me, my poor Selysette ; that, for all your smiles, your cheek is ever growing paler and paler, and no sooner do you believe you are alone than your tears begin to flow. . . .

[AGLAVAINE enters, unperceived, at the back of the room.

MELIGRANE.

. . . And tell me how you think all this can end. . . I have turned it over patiently, sitting here in this corner of mine, and I am doing what I can to speak calmly, though I grieve to see the suffering that has come to you, and that you have done nothing to deserve. There are only two human solutions to sorrows such as these ; either must one of you die or the other go away. . . And who should go away, if not the one whom destiny sent too late ? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Why she, rather than the one who came too soon ?

AGLAVAINE.

[Coming forward.] One cannot come too soon, my poor Selysette . . . one comes when the hour

has sounded, and I think our grandmother is right. . .

SELYSETTE.

If she be right there is much unhappiness before us. . .

AGLAVAINE.

And if she be wrong, there will still be tears. . . Adieu, Selysette. It is late ; Meleander is waiting for you. . .

SELYSETTE.

Will you not come and embrace him with me, Aglavaine ?

AGLAVAINE.

I shall never kiss him again, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

What has happened, Aglavaine ? Your eyes are shining. You are keeping something from me. . .

AGLAVAINE.

My eyes are shining because I have no longer anything to keep back, Selysette. . . But a few moments ago I realised how far deeper his love lay for you than he imagined. . .

SELYSETTE.

Did he say so ? . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Nay, if he had said so I should not have been so sure. . .

SELYSETTE.

And you, Aglavaine, does he not love you any more ?

AGLAVAINE.

He loves me less than he loves you, Selysette . . .

SELYSETTE.

Oh ! my poor Aglavaine ! . . . But it is impossible. . . Why should he love you less ? Tell me what to do . . . Shall I stay with you ? . . . I will tell him. . .

AGLAVAINE.

No, no . . . go to him, Selysette . . . never shall I be happier than I am to-night. . .

[*They kiss each other silently and go out by different doors.*

ACT THIRD

SCENE I.—*In the Park.*

Enter MELEANDER and SELYSETTE.

SELYSETTE.

Forgive me, Meleander—you would rather be alone, I know. I am always a cause of sorrow to you ; but I will only stay a moment. . . . I have just come from Aglavaine's room—she is already asleep ; I kissed her and she awoke not, though the stars were shining on her bed. . . . I shall not keep you long ; and then we will go and wake her, for she is sobbing in her sleep I was afraid to wake her by myself—but there is something I want to ask you so far, I do not know whether I am right or wrong—or whether it be good or bad I cannot ask Aglavaine, and you will forgive me if I am mistaken.

MELEANDER.

What is it, Selysette ?—Come here, and sit by me. I will play with your hair while you talk ; and not seeing me, you will be able to speak out more bravely I believe there is something that presses heavily on your heart. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Not on my heart, Meleander . . . but on me . . . I know not where . . . on my soul, perhaps . . . it is something that weighs me down and makes me understand—what? . . . I know nothing of it yet, but I am happier than when my soul was free. . .

MELEANDER.

. . . There are times when the poor heart is almost overwhelmed, and the soul still deems itself happy. . . But enough of this; tell me first of all what it is that distresses you to-night. . .

SELYSETTE.

Aglavaine is going. . .

MELEANDER.

Who?—Aglavaine? Did she say so to you?

SELYSETTE.

Yes. . .

MELEANDER.

When? . . . And why is she going?

SELYSETTE.

She did not say . . . but she will certainly go; for now she thinks it is right, and that it should be done . . . and I am asking myself whether it would not be better that I should go instead. . .

MELEANDER.

Who?—You, Selysette?—But what can have happened? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Nothing has happened, Meleander; and I beseech you, say not a word of this to Aglavaine—you would only call forth her tears, though there be no cause for them. . . . But, you see, Meleander, I have been thinking these things over, too, while you and she have been together and I sat there by the side of our grandmother . . . and when you two came back, you were always so happy, so united, that every one was compelled to be silent, as you drew near. I have often said to myself that I am only a poor little creature who could never follow in your footsteps ; but you have both been so good to me that I did not realise this as soon as I should, and you have often wanted me to go with you, because I was sad. And when I was there, each of you seemed very lighthearted, but there was not the same happiness in your souls, and I was between you like a stranger shivering with cold. And yet it was not your fault, nor was it my fault either. I know full well that I cannot understand ; but I know also that this is a thing that has to be understood. . . .

MELEANDER.

My dear, dear and good Selysette . . . what is it that you think you do not understand ?—Do you imagine that we understand something that you do not? . . . It is always the soul that knows how to display itself that attracts us, but the one that hides is no less beautiful ; nay, it may well be

more beautiful, by dint of its very unconsciousness. . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no; though I tried my hardest, there would always be a difference, Meleander; and whenever something I do pleases you, it is only because I have been trying to imitate Aglavaine. . .

MELEANDER.

Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

Oh, Meleander, I did not say that to reproach you . . . did you think it was meant as a reproach? I am no longer as I used to be, and I shall never reproach any one again. Even I myself cannot tell why I have changed like this, and if any one had told me, a little time ago, that the sadness would bring happiness with it, and that I should one day press my lips on the lips of the woman you were to love—if any one had told me this, I should never have believed it; and yet it has all come to pass and I cannot help it. . . And though you tell me that you love me, thinking thus to drive away my sadness, you can never say to me the things you say to Aglavaine. . .

MELEANDER.

Perhaps I could not say the same things, Selysette. The things that we really wish to say can never be put into words, and it may be that when we wish to speak very earnestly to one we

love, we are but replying to questions that the ears cannot hear. And never do two different souls ask the same questions. And therefore, though we know it not, are our words never the same. . . But the questions that your candid soul puts to me, my poor Selysette, are as beautiful as the questions of Aglavaine's soul. . . They come from another region, that is all. So let that not sadden you, Selysette. . . Come, give me your lips. . . I kiss you on your soul to-night, Selysette. . . Come, midnight is striking. . . Let us go and see whether Aglavaine be still sobbing in her sleep. . .

[They go out with their arms about each other.]

SCENE II.—*A room in the castle.*

Enter AGLAVAINE and MELEANDER.

AGLAVAINE.

Do you hear that door close?

MELEANDER.

Yes.

AGLAVAINE.

It is Selysette. . . She heard us coming and wished to leave us alone together. . .

MELEANDER.

She said to me that she would be going to her tower this morning; they have told her of a great strange bird. . .

AGLAVAINE.

I am certain she must have been here; the whole room seems to be awaiting her return. . . . Look at the little work-things she has left by the window . . . the skeins of silk, the jewels, the gold and silver threads. . . .

MELEANDER.

And here is her ring with our names inscribed on it. . . . And there are violets—and here is her handkerchief. . . . [He takes the handkerchief and trembles as he touches it.] Ah! . . .

AGLAVAINE.

What is it? . . .

MELEANDER.

[Hands her the handkerchief.] Here. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Ah! . . .

MELEANDER.

It is still warm with her tears. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

You see, Meleander . . . as she will not speak, here are these smallest things of all that speak for her, and tell me it is time. . . . [She takes the handkerchief.] Give it to me, Meleander. . . . Poor little witness of all that is hidden from us, not to understand thee one must be dead indeed. . . .

MELEANDER.

Aglavaine. . .

[*He tries to kiss her.*

AGLAVAINE.

Do not kiss me. . . Love her well, Meleander. . .

MELEANDER.

I do not know what to believe, Aglavaine. . . There are times when I seem to love her almost as much as I love you, and times when I love her more than you, because she is further from me, or that I understand her less. . . And then, when I see you again, she disappears, I no longer am conscious of her. . .

AGLAVAINE.

I know that you love her, Meleander, and therefore I must go. . .

MELEANDER.

But it is only in you that I can love her, Aglavaine, and when you are far away, I shall love her no longer.

AGLAVAINE.

I know that you love her, Meleander, and so well do I know it that I have more than once envied the poor child the love that you gave her. . . Ah! do not think I am perfect! . . . If Selysette is no longer as she seemed, I too have

changed since I have lived among you. When I came I was wiser than one had need to be. I told myself that beauty could not be blamed for the tears it caused to flow, and I believed the goodness vain that had not wisdom for its guide. But now I realise that true goodness is human and foolish, and stands in no need of wisdom. . . I thought myself the most beautiful of women ; I have learned that the feeblest of creatures are as beautiful as I, and they know not of their beauty. . . When I look at Selysette, I ask myself whether the timid efforts of her tender soul be not greater, and a thousand times purer, than anything I can do. There is something in my heart whispers me that she is unspeakably beautiful. She has only to stretch out her hands, and they come back laden with her heart's treasures, and she offers the priceless gems as tremblingly as might a little maid who was blind, and knew not that her two hands were full of diamonds and pearls. . .

MELEANDER.

It is strange, Aglavaine. . . . When you speak to me of her I admire you and you only, and love you more and more. . . You praise her, but the praise falls back on you, and nothing in this world can make it otherwise. My love for her can never approach my love for you, even though a God so willed it. . .

AGLAVAIN.

When I came here, I believed that all things were possible, and that no one need suffer. . . . But now I see that life refuses to conform to our plans, be they never so beautiful. . . . And I feel too that were I to linger by your side and cause others to suffer, I should no longer be what you are, nor would you be what I am, and our love would no longer be the same as our love of to-day. . . .

MELEANDER.

It may be so, Aglavaine. . . . But, for all that, should we not be in the right? . . .

AGLAVAIN.

Ah, Meleander, it matters so little whether one be right or not! Better, I think, be wrong all one's life than bring tears to the eyes of those who are not in the right! . . . I too know all that might be said; but why say it, seeing that we know full well that it can nowise alter the deeper truth that will have none of our most beautiful words. . . . It is this we must listen to, this truth that disdains fair speeches! Notwithstanding all that we say and do, it is the simplicity of things that directs our life; and to struggle against that which is simple is only to court failure. . . . Why were we made to meet, you and I, when it was too late? Who knows? Who would dare to say that destiny and Providence are not one? . . .

MELEANDER.

[*Clasping her in his arms.*] I love you, Aglavaine; and it is the best love of all that is coming upon us. . .

AGLAVAINE.

[*Putting her arms around his neck.*] I love you, Meleander, and the love that is coming upon us is the love that never dies. . .

[*A silence.*

MELEANDER.

Have you given a thought to what our life will be in the time to come, when we shall be far away from each other, when all that will remain of this great love of ours will be the faint memory that will fade away like all memories? What shall I be doing next year? What will you be doing next year, out yonder? . . . The weary days and months will frown upon us as we stretch out arms to each other across the emptiness. . . . For all that we say that our love will remain unchanged through the years that will divide us, and the forests and trees that will stretch between, this poor life of ours is too full of moments when the tenderest recollection yields before the absence that lasts too long. . .

AGLAVAINE.

I know it, Meleander. . . Here, we might be happy; there, unhappiness most assuredly awaits us. . . And none the less do we both feel that the

thing which I am doing is the thing which should be done. . . . And, were you able to pronounce a word that would keep me here, you would not say that word. . . . Needs must those who love that for which others care not, have sorrows that others cannot conceive. There is no reward, my poor Meleander, but we two look for none.

[*They go out.*

SCENE III.—*At the foot of a tower.*

Enter AGLAVAIN and MELEANDER.

AGLAVAIN.

'Twas not a moment ago that I saw her. She was at the top of the tower, surrounded by screaming sea-gulls. For the last two or three days she has spent most of her time up there. And I know not what strange shadow it throws across my soul. She seems to be less unhappy, but at the same time more troubled in her mind, and it is as though some plan were being prepared in that profound little heart of hers. . . .

MELEANDER.

She seems to be smiling at her former life—at the Selysette of old. . . . Have you not noticed that there is always a song on her lips? . . . A mysterious light seems to shine upon her as she walks before us. . . . It would be better not to speak of your departure till she is calmer; better to wait till all

that is now transforming her has taken deeper root in her soul. . .

AGLAVAINE.

No; I shall tell her to-day. . . And as to what should be said to her, I have thought that over too, and at first I imagined it would be well to conceal the truth, so that she should suffer less. . . Do not smile, Meleander. . . There is so little of the ordinary woman in me that you may well be surprised to find that I am like other women in this—that in the depths of my heart I, too, possess their feeble, tortuous wisdom—and that, when love commands it, falsehood comes to me as readily as to my sisters. . . So I had made up my mind to tell her that I no longer loved you, that I had deceived myself, that your love for me was dead too, and countless other little things that would have lessened me in her eyes, and thus lessen her grief, too. But in truth, when those great pure eyes of hers confronted me, I felt that it was not possible, because it was not beautiful. . . Listen. . . I hear her; she is coming down the tower-stairs, singing. . . Leave us, Meleander; I must speak to her alone, for she says things to me that she cannot yet say to you; and besides, it is only when two people are alone together that truth descends from its very fairest heaven. . .

[MELEANDER goes. A silence; then the voice of SELYSETTE is heard as it gradually comes nearer.]

The voice of SELYSETTE.

When forth her love went
(I heard the door close)
When forth her love went,
She smiled. . .

When back he did fare
(I heard the lamp burn)
When back he did fare
Another was there. . .

And I could see Death
(I heard her soul moan)
And I could see Death
That still watches her breath. . .

SELYSETTE comes in.

AGLAVAINE.

Oh, Selysette, how bright your eyes are this morning! . . .

SELYSETTE.

It is because a beautiful thought has come to me, Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVAINE.

Tell it to me; we must never keep back a beautiful thought, for all the world is the happier for it. . .

SELYSETTE.

I cannot tell it to you yet. . . Little Selysette has her secret too, and a secret it must remain!

. . . But what would you have done had you been Selysette—what would you have done if another Aglavaine, even more beautiful than you, had appeared one day and thrown her arms around Meleander ?

AGLAVAINE.

I think I should have tried to be happy—to feel that more light had flown into the house, and I should have tried to love her even as you love me, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

You would not have been jealous ?

AGLAVAINE.

I cannot tell, Selysette . . . in the depths of my heart, perhaps . . . for one moment . . . but I should have recognised that it was unworthy, and I should have tried to be happy. . .

SELYSETTE.

I am going to be happy, Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVAINE.

Not for one single instant shall you ever be unhappy again. . .

SELYSETTE.

I should be perfectly happy if I were only sure that this idea of mine was good. . .

AGLAVAINE.

So there is something you mean to hide from me, Selysette ? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes, but only till it has become very beautiful. . .

AGLAVAINE.

When will it be very beautiful?

SELYSETTE.

When I know. . . when I know. . . Little Selysette can be beautiful too. . . you will see, you will see. . . Oh you will love me much more, both of you. . .

AGLAVAINE.

Is it possible to love you more than we do, Selysette? . . .

SELYSETTE.

I would so dearly like to know what you would do, if you were I?

AGLAVAINE.

Tell me then, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

If I were to tell you it would no longer be the same, and you could not tell me the truth. . .

AGLAVAINE.

Do I not speak the truth? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes, I know; but here you could not. . .

AGLAVAINE.

You are strange to-day, Selysette; take care, for it may be that you are wrong. . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no; let me kiss you, Aglavaine . . . every kiss will whisper to me that I am not wrong. . .

AGLAVAINE.

There is a strange brightness in your eyes, my little Selysette . . . as though your soul were leaping within you. . .

SELYSETTE.

And your eyes are brighter to-day, too, though you try to hide them. . .

AGLAVAINE.

I also have something to say to you, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

Oh what is it, Aglavaine? . . . you look as though you were afraid, as well as I . . . Can it be the same thing? . . .

AGLAVAINE.

What thing, Selysette? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Nothing, nothing . . . I was merely . . . tell me what it is, quickly. . .

AGLAVAINE.

I am afraid it may distress you, Selysette, though it ought to bring happiness to you. . .

SELYSETTE.

I shall never shed another tear, Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVAINE.

[*Seizing her arm.*] What does this mean, Selysette? you said that so strangely. . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no . . . I shall not cry any more, that is all; is that not as it should be?

AGLAVAINE.

Let me look into your eyes. . .

SELYSETTE.

Look, look . . . tell me what you see. . .

AGLAVAINE.

For all that we say the soul shows itself in the eyes, it seems to vanish as we gaze into them. . . And as I stand, with the fears I dare not speak of upon me, before the limpid waters of your eyes, it is they that seem to question me, and to murmur timidly: "What dost thou read?" instead of answering the question I cannot frame. . .

[*A silence.*

SELYSETTE.

Aglavaine? . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Selysette? . . .

SELYSETTE.

What was it you were going to tell me? . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Come to me, little Selysette! Alas! but a little more and I had taken from you all you had in the world. . .

SELYSETTE.

You are sad, Aglavaine? . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Let us sit here, at the threshold of your tower, and let your lips be close to mine, as on that evening when we spoke to each other for the first time . . . do you remember that evening by the well? More than a month ago, my poor Selysette; many things have died since then, many sprung to life, and a little more light has come unto the soul. . . Not many more moments such as this will be vouchsafed to us, for to-morrow I wend my way from amongst you, and everything that we do for the last time of all seems so grave and solemn to these poor hearts of ours. . .

SELYSETTE.

You mean to go to-morrow?

AGLAVAINE.

Yes, to-morrow, Selysette: it was that I wanted to tell you. At first I thought it would be best

to keep back the truth, so that the sorrow should not come upon you all at once. . . But when I thought of you, I felt at once that it could not be. . . And therefore I have come to tell you that to-morrow I shall go from here in order that you may be happy, and I tell it you in all simplicity, content that you should know how my departure saddens me, content even that you should share in the sacrifice; for we are all three making this sacrifice, and making it for something that, nameless though it be, is yet far stronger than we. . .

SELYSETTE.

Do not go to-morrow, Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVAINE.

Why not to-morrow, since go I must? . . .

SELYSETTE.

I ask you not to go till I have told what I have to tell. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Will you tell me soon?

SELYSETTE.

Yes, for now I am sure. . . And does Meleander know what you have just now said to me?

AGLAVAINE.

Yes.

SELYSETTE.

I am no longer sad, Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVAINE.

What would you have done, Selysette, if I had gone away without telling you ?

SELYSETTE.

I should have followed and brought you back, Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVAINE.

And if you had not found me ?

SELYSETTE.

I should have spent my life seeking you. . .

AGLAVAINE.

My fear is lest you should go before I do, Selysette—I am wondering whether that can be the idea you spoke of. . .

SELYSETTE.

No, for there would be sorrow in that, and my idea now is full of gladness . . . I had thought, I too, of going away without saying a word, but now. . .

AGLAVAINE.

Now you will not go ?

SELYSETTE.

No, no, Aglavaine mine ; I shall not leave the castle. . .

AGLAVAINE.

You promise me that, from the depths of your soul ?

SELYSETTE.

From the depths of my soul, and by my eternal happiness, Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVAINE.

It had been better, perhaps, that I had never come. . .

SELYSETTE.

In that case I had never been happy or unhappy, for I was nothing. . .

AGLAVAINE.

Perhaps it is not well to awaken those who slumber, above all when their sleep is innocent and sweet. . .

SELYSETTE.

Surely it must be well, Aglavaine, since they never wish to slumber again. . . When I think of the time when my eyes were sealed, I would fain hide myself for shame. . . When I used to kiss Meleander I was only a little blind girl who did not know . . . but was it altogether my fault that I counted for so little ? . . . Whereas now . . . I looked at him to-night as he lay asleep . . . and then . . . I can tell you, Aglavaine ? . . .

AGLAVAINE.

[*Embracing her.*] Selysette, my little Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

And then I kissed him, but he did not awake. . . And I could see the stars in the blue of the windows; and I felt as though all those stars had come to me to build a heaven in my soul. . . Oh my poor Aglavaine, you will never know—for you always knew. . . But to be able to say, "I love you," to be able to say it with one's eyes open, to the man one loves! . . . I understand now. . . I know not why I am yearning all the time to go away or to die. . . I am happy, and fain would I die, so as to be happier still. . .

AGLAVAINE.

It is dangerous to think of death at moments of too much happiness. . . I will make a confession to you. . . For one second the fear rushed across me that the idea you spoke of before . . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes. . .

AGLAVAINE.

That that might have been the idea. . .

SELYSETTE.

You need not be afraid, Aglavaine, such an idea as that could come only to quite a little girl. . .

AGLAVAINE.

Yes, it would be the idea of a blind little heart, to whom death might seem the one proof of love. . . . Whereas, on the contrary, those who love must live ; and the more we love, the more must we wish to live. . . . But apart from that, I knew that your love for us was far above that kind of love. . . . And surely it is only some one who longs to plunge two fellow creatures into despair, who could devise anything so terribly cruel as to place an innocent death between them. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Shall I make a confession too, Aglavaine ? . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Tell me everything, even as I have told you everything, my little Selysette. It is sweet to feel that there is nothing between us, not even a flower wherein could hide a thought not shared by both. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I had thought of it for an instant. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Of death ?

SELYSETTE.

Yes, long ago. . . . But I at once told myself all you have just told me ; and then something else came to me. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

And that is ?

SELYSETTE.

Oh something quite different, and it is on the side of life. . . . But the time for telling is not yet. . . . You shall see. . . . I kiss you, Aglavaine. . . . I feel I know not what . . . it is as though my soul—was it you who said it? . . . as though my soul were leaping within me. . . . And now I know at last what you would do if you were I. . . .

[*They go out with their arms about each other.*

ACT FOURTH

SCENE I.—*A terrace overlooking the sea.*

AGLAVAINE and SELYSETTE enter and meet each other.

AGLAVAINE.

The sun is rising over the sea, Selysette ; and the waves are full of joy in their tranquillity. The fragrance and limpid silence of the dawn make one feel as though one were alone in the world, and there is something of the dawn in every word one says ; is it not so ? The day will be very beautiful. Shall it be the day of my departure ?

SELYSETTE.

No, no ; you shall not go. . .

AGLAVAINE.

I came to meet you because I saw you just now from the window of my room. I was frightened, Selysette. . . You were leaning over, nearly all your body was leaning over the crumbling old wall at the top of the tower. I imagined for a moment that the stones were giving way. I turned pale, pale—there was a chill at my heart that I had never known before. I felt my life trembling on

my lips. . . . I opened the window and screamed to warn you; but you did not understand. . . . Destiny is capricious—you do wrong to tempt it thus. What were you doing up there? This is the third time I have seen you on the tower. . . . Your hands seemed to be pulling at the stones. . . . What were you doing, Selysette? You seemed to be seeking something in space. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes, I was seeking something. . . . Have they not told you? . . . But first of all do not be frightened about me, there is no cause. . . . My old tower is stronger than they think; it will outlive us all. Why speak ill of it? It has done no one any harm, so far; and the stones are fast; I know that better than any one. . . . But have you not noticed? Here is something taking place so close to you, and you know nothing of it! . . . Five or six days ago a strange bird came to us, and it flies round and round my tower, and never seems to tire. . . . Its wings are green—a strange, pale green, inconceivably strange and pale. . . . And there is something else that is inconceivable, too; it seems to grow day by day. . . . None have been able to tell me from what country it has come. . . . I think it must have made its nest in a crevice in the wall; it was there that you saw me bending over. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Is that the key of the tower, that great golden key with which you are playing? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes; you remember I let it fall the day you arrived. . .

AGLAVAINE.

Will you give it to me? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Give it to you? . . . Why? . . .

AGLAVAINE.

I would like to keep it by me till I go. . .

SELYSETTE.

But why, Aglavaine?

AGLAVAINE.

I scarcely know. . . Wait till I am far away before you go up there again, Selysette, and leave the bird with the green wings alone. . . Last night I dreamed, and the bird appeared in my dream. . .

SELYSETTE.

Here is the key, Aglavaine. . . I don't mind giving it to you. . . It is heavy. . .

AGLAVAINE.

Yes, it is very heavy.

SELYSETTE.

Kiss me, Aglavaine. . . Have I made you unhappy? . . .

AGLAVAINE.

You have never yet made any one unhappy. . .
Your eyes are filled with tears. . .

SELYSETTE.

I was looking at the sun, as I kissed you. . .
Kiss me again. . . I was going to Meleander, he
told me he would be up early. . . Good-bye,
Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVAINE.

[Slowly.] Good-bye, Selysette. . .

[SELYSETTE goes. AGLAVAINE waits till she
is far away, then, going to the end of the
terrace, she looks for an instant at the
golden key and, with a sudden movement,
flings it far away into the sea. Then she
goes too.

SCENE II.—*A room in the castle.*

MELIGRANE is asleep at the back. Enter SELYSETTE holding little YSSALINE by the hand.

SELYSETTE.

Let us kiss grandam first of all; for who will kiss her when we are gone? And surely she needs our kisses no less than the others. . . . But say nothing to her. . . Aglavaine took away the key of my tower, because she was afraid. But I have found the other key—the one we thought was

lost. And so we can go up without any one knowing, and I will capture the green bird. . .

YSSALINE.

Will you give it to me at once ?

SELYSETTE.

I will give it to you if you say nothing. But be careful, I am going to awaken grandam. . . Do I look unhappy, Yssaline ? . . .

YSSALINE.

Is there anything I can say that would make you happy, little sister ?

SELYSETTE.

You must tell me the truth. . . Grandam must not imagine that I am unhappy. You see, often when one is very happy people make mistakes and believe one has been crying. . . You cannot see that I have been crying ?

YSSALINE.

Let me look at you carefully, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

Can you see anything ?

YSSALINE.

You must come nearer to me, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

I will take you in my arms and kiss you. . . You see nothing ? . .

YSSALINE.

One never quite knows when you are crying, little sister ; you do it so softly. . .

SELYSETTE.

But I have not been crying at all. . . And remember, if they ask you to-day, when you are alone, "What did she say, what did she do, was she pale, or sad ?" you must not answer all at once if you see that they are frightened, or if those about you are too pale. . . But you must tell them that I seemed to be happy, and indeed every one can see that I do nothing but smile, that I am smiling all the time ; and we must always tell the truth. Now, be careful, for I am going to grandam. . . Ah ! how forsaken she looks ! . . . [She imprints a long kiss upon MELIGRANE'S lips.] Grandam. . . [MELIGRANE does not awake.] It is I, grandam. . . How heavily she sleeps. . . Grandam, I am come to bid you good-bye.

MELIGRANE.

[Awaking.] Ah ! it is you, Selysette ? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes, grandam, Yssaline and I have come to kiss you, for we are going for a walk to-day. . .

MELIGRANE.

Whither are you going ?

SELYSETTE.

I do not know yet, but we mean to go a little further than usual. . . We shall not be back before evening. Have you all you need, grandam? Aglavaine will come and take care of you in my stead. Shall I arrange the cushions before I go? I am the only one who knows how to lift you without hurting you. But Aglavaine will learn. She is so good that she will know at once if you will only let her. . . Shall I call her? . . .

MELIGRANE.

No, no; I shall sleep till you return. . .

SELYSETTE.

Good-bye, grandam, good-bye. . .

MELIGRANE.

Good-bye, Selysette; come back before the night. . .

[SELYSETTE goes quickly, holding little YSSALINE by the hand.]

SCENE III.—*A corridor in the castle.*

MELEANDER meets SELYSETTE, who is holding little YSSALINE by the hand.

MELEANDER.

Where are you going so hurriedly, Selysette?

SELYSETTE.

Nowhere, Meleander. . . We are seeking shelter from the sun. . .

MELEANDER.

In very truth this is a day when the stones seem to melt in the walls, and the sea to have turned into a fiery lake. The eternal freshness of the forest is nothing but the heated breath of a funeral pile; and the sun looks like a raging lion about to swallow up the sky. . . Kiss me, Selysette, for if there linger yet any fragrance of the dawn it is surely to be found on your lips. . .

SELYSETTE.

No; I have no time; they are waiting for me—you shall kiss me this evening. . .

MELEANDER.

What is the matter, Selysette?

SELYSETTE.

Ah! It is such a little thing and over so soon! . .

MELEANDER.

What do you say?

SELYSETTE.

Nothing, nothing. . . Kiss me quickly. . .

[*She kisses him violently.*

MELEANDER.

Ah! . . . my lip is bleeding. . .

SELYSETTE.

What?

MELEANDER.

A drop of blood. . . Those beautiful little teeth
of yours have wounded me, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

Oh, I am a little . . . a little wolf. . . Have I
hurt you, Meleander? . . .

MELEANDER.

It is nothing. . .

SELYSETTE.

Oh, I am a little . . . a little wolf. . . What
time is it?

MELEANDER.

Close on noon.

SELYSETTE.

Noon? Oh, I must hurry. . . they are waiting,
waiting. . . Good-bye, my Meleander.

MELEANDER.

Selysette, Selysette, where are you going?

SELYSETTE.

[*Singing as she hastens away with little
YSSALINE.*

When forth her love went
(I heard the door close)
When forth her love went
She smiled. . .

[*MELEANDER stands looking after her: then
goes out.*

SCENE IV.—*At the top of the tower.*

Enter SELYSETTE and little YSSALINE.

SELYSETTE.

Here we are, Yssaline, in the turret of the tower, and now we must know what we have to do. . . . Oh the brightness there is this morning over earth and sea and sky! Why is this day so much more beautiful than other days? . . .

YSSALINE.

Where is the green bird?

SELYSETTE.

He is there, but we cannot see him yet. . . . In a minute or two we will lean over the wall, but let us look around us first. One can see the castle and the courtyards, the woods and the gardens. All the flowers have opened on the banks. . . . How green the grass is this morning! . . . I cannot see Aglavaine. . . . Oh look, there is Meleander. . . . He is waiting for her. . . . Bend down, we must hide; he must not know we are here. He is close to the well; it was there that I awakened Aglavaine. . . .

YSSALINE.

Look, little sister, look; come here. . . . I can see the gardener planting flowers round the house. . . .

SELYSETTE.

You will see them grow and you will see them open, Yssaline, and you will pluck them for me. . . Come, come, it is more than I can bear. . . Let us look from here; here there is only the sea, which is far away. . . [They go to the other side of the tower.] How beautiful the sea is too! . . . In not a single corner is sorrow to be found to-day. . . The sea is so green, so deep, so beautiful, that one's courage goes. . . And whatever may happen, Yssaline, it will go on smiling just the same until nightfall. . . Look at the little waves on the beach. . . I cannot, I tell you, I cannot! . . . The flowers and the sea will not let me. . . I shall never be able to do it in the daylight.

YSSALINE.

Oh, here are the gulls, little sister, the gulls are coming! Oh how many there are! . . . how many! There must be two thousand! . . .

SELYSETTE.

They have all flown here together from the far end of the sea. . . They look as though they were bringing us news. . .

YSSALINE.

No, no; it is fish they are bringing, little sister. . . And their young ones are screaming, too, from their holes in the wall. . . Their beaks are bigger than they are. . . Look, look, do you

see that great gull with the eel? . . . Don't you see? . . . There, there. . . They have eaten it already. . . And the others are over there too. . . The big ones are eating nothing. . . There again, did you see? . . . She kept nothing for herself. . . Is she the mother, little sister?

SELYSETTE.

What did I say to grandam, Yssaline?

YSSALINE.

Why are you crying, little sister?

SELYSETTE.

I am not crying, Yssaline—I am thinking, thinking. Did I kiss her before I went away? . . .

YSSALINE.

Yes, you kissed her as you said good-bye.

SELYSETTE.

How often did I kiss her?

YSSALINE.

Once, little sister, we had no time. . .

SELYSETTE.

I fear I was not gentle enough. . .

YSSALINE.

We were in a great hurry, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no ; it must not be . . . She will be quite alone, Yssaline, and this will ever linger in her mind. You see, if you have not been gentler than usual when you go away, they believe that you no longer love them . . . Whereas it is the contrary they should believe ; it is just when our love is too great that we are afraid to be gentle. . . Though perhaps we are wrong ; for whatever they do, and were they to live a thousand years, it is only the last word we said to them that they can remember. . . I saw that myself when my mother went. . . At the last moment of all she did not smile at me, and it comes back to me again and again that she did not smile. . . And the rest of life seems scarcely to count. . . And besides, what did I say of Aglavaine ? . . . I don't remember. I must see grandam again. . . The others, it is for them ; they must not know. . . But she is quite alone ; and it is not for her sake that I climb into the tower, not for her sake that I shall go down . . . you must see that it is impossible. . . Come, come, we will go and kiss her very tenderly. . . [They go out.]

SCENE V.—*A room in the castle.*

MELIGRANE is asleep. SELYSETTE and little YSSALINE come in.

SELYSETTE.

[Waking Meligrane.] Grandam. . .

MELIGRANE.

You are back at last, Selysette. . . I have long been waiting for you. . .

SELYSETTE.

Forgive me, grandam, I fear I was not as gentle as I should have been when I bade you good-bye. . .

MELIGRANE.

Oh but you were, Selysette, you were very gentle. What is the matter? There is something on your mind. . .

SELYSETTE.

There is nothing on my mind, grandam. It is only that I feel I must tell you how I love you. . .

MELIGRANE.

I know you do, Selysette. You have shown me your love again and again, and I never have doubted it. . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes, grandam, I know . . . but I myself have never known till now. . .

MELIGRANE.

Come nearer to me, my child—you know that I can no longer embrace those I love, now that these poor arms of mine have ceased to do my bidding. . . Put your arms round me again as I cannot put mine around you. . . You seem

strange to-day, Selysette. And so it is only now that you know you love me?

SELYSETTE.

Oh no; I knew it, I knew it, but sometimes one knows a thing so long without knowing. . . And then, one day, we feel we have not been kind enough, that we might have done more, that we have not loved as we should have loved. And we want to begin again before it be too late. I have neither father nor mother, grandam, and had you not been there, I should have forgotten what a mother might mean. . . . But you never forsook little Selysette, and it was a great joy to know there was some one to go to when I was unhappy. . .

MELIGRANE.

No, no, Selysette mine, it was you who did not abandon me. . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no, grandam. . . I know full well that it is you who stayed on for my sake. . .

MELIGRANE.

You are strangely serious this afternoon, Selysette, and for all that you do not seem sad. . .

SELYSETTE.

I have always been very happy, grandam, and now I know the meaning of happiness. . . .

MELIGRANE.

You do not mean that it has gone from you,
Selysette ?

SELYSETTE.

Far from that, I believe I have found it,
grandam. . . . And tell me, have you been happy?

MELIGRANE.

When, Selysette ?

SELYSETTE.

In the time that has gone, grandam. . .

MELIGRANE.

Of what time do you speak, my child ?

SELYSETTE.

The time when life was. . .

MELIGRANE.

There have come to me days of sorrow even as
they come to all that live on this earth, but I may
truly claim to have been happy, since you have
never once left me. . .

SELYSETTE.

You must not let me count for so much in your
happiness, grandam. . . If you were to lose me you
would still have Aglavaine. . .

MELIGRANE.

I have never lulled her to sleep on my knee,
Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

But still you must love her, grandam. . .

MELIGRANE.

You love her, and therefore I love her, my child. . .

SELYSETTE.

And most of all should you love her, because it was she who brought happiness to me. . . She is so beautiful, she is so beautiful that ever since my heart has known of her, I have lived by her side with my eyes full of tears. . .

MELIGRANE.

How your hands burn to-day, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

It is because my happiness is too great. . .

MELIGRANE.

I love you, Selysette mine. . .

SELYSETTE.

Have I ever been the cause of sorrow to you, grandam?

MELIGRANE.

I cannot remember, my child. . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes, yes, you must needs remember . . . for we bring sorrow to all those we love. . . But tell me, I beg of you, when it was that I hurt you the most. . .

MELIGRANE.

It was only when you cried that you saddened me; and then it was not your fault. . . I remember nothing else. . .

SELYSETTE.

I shall never cry again. . .

MELIGRANE.

Ah, Selysette, happiness sways to and fro like the pendulum of a clock. But we do well to keep back our tears as long as we can. . .

SELYSETTE.

You are right, grandam; and when happiness shall have returned to you—to them and to you, grandam, get them to sit beside you one evening and tell them the story of a poor little girl. . .

MELIGRANE.

What are you saying, Selysette?

SELYSETTE.

Nothing, nothing. . . I was thinking of the days when I was a little child. . .

MELIGRANE.

So do I often think of those days, Selysette. I was not ill, then, and I was able to carry you in my arms or run after you. . . And thus, thanks to you, I have been a mother a second time, long after my

beauty had left me; and some day you will know that women never weary of motherhood, that they would cherish death itself, did it fall asleep on their knee. . . But little by little all passes away, Selysette, and the very smallest soon cease to be small. . .

SELYSETTE.

I know it, grandam, and sorrow passes away, too, passes away and disappears. . . But beauty remains and others are happy. . .

MELIGRANE.

Who told you that, my child?

SELYSETTE.

I learned it from Aglavaine. . .

MELIGRANE.

How your eyes sparkle to-day, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

[*Stifling a sob.*] It is because I love all the world, grandam. . .

MELIGRANE.

I believe you are crying, my child? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Oh no, I am not crying; and if one or two tears are falling, they are only tears of joy. . .

MELIGRANE.

Put your arms around me, Selysette—closer, closer, and stay with me. . .

YSSALINE.

Little sister, I want to be kissed too. . .

SELYSETTE.

[*Gently moving Yssaline away.*] No, no, Yssaline, she shall have all my kisses to-day. . . The day will soon come when it will be your turn to have all the kisses. . . . Farewell, grandam, farewell. . .

MELIGRANE.

Selysette! . . . what is the matter? . . . where are you going? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Farewell, grandam, farewell. . .

MELIGRANE.

Selysette, stay here. . . I won't have it. . . You shall not go. . . [*She struggles in vain to rise and stretch out her arms.*] I cannot, I cannot. . . You see that I cannot, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

I, too, cannot, grandam . . . farewell . . . sleep in peace to-night and—do not dream . . . farewell, farewell. . .

[*She goes out quickly holding little Yssaline by the hand.*

MELIGRANE.

Selysette! . . . Selysette! . . .

[She is heard sobbing softly to herself as the light grows fainter and fainter.

SCENE VI.—*A Corridor in the Castle.*

[Enter SELYSETTE holding little YSSALINE by the hand. She sees AGLAVAINE coming to meet her, and hides with little YSSALINE behind one of the pillars which support the roof.

AGLAVAINE.

[Drawing near.] Is it you, Selysette? Why are you hiding?

SELYSETTE.

I scarcely know, Aglavaine. . . I thought you would like to be alone. . .

AGLAVAINE.

Where were you going to, Selysette? . . And here is little Yssaline looking at me from the corners of her eyes. . . Is there a plot between you?

SELYSETTE.

I have made a promise that I must keep. . .

AGLAVAINE.

Whither were you dragging Selysette, Yssaline? [YSSALINE does not answer.] Won't you tell me?

SELYSETTE.

Oh, she knows how to keep a secret quite as well as though she were grown up. . .

AGLAVAINE.

It may be the evening light, but you look very pale, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

I want to kiss you, Aglavaine. . .

[*They exchange a long kiss.*

AGLAVAINE.

Oh, your lips are soft and sweet to-night, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

Yours too, Aglavaine. . . I am very happy. . . There is strength on your lips. . .

AGLAVAINE.

A light shines from you as from a lamp. . .

SELYSETTE.

You have not seen grandam ?

AGLAVAINE.

No. Shall I go to her ?

SELYSETTE.

No, no ; there is no need ; she is asleep. . . You were looking for Meleander ?

AGLAVAINE.

Yes. And you, Selysette ?

SELYSETTE.

When you see him, kiss him for me. . . I am glad to think that it is you who will kiss him when I am not there. . . I love you so much, so much ! . . . But see how impatient Yssaline is, and how she is pulling my hand. . . Good-bye, Aglavaine mine ; you will see me soon. . .

[*She goes with little Yssaline, and sings as she moves along.*

When back he did fare
(I heard the lamp burn)
When back he did fare
Another was there . . .
And I could see. . . Ah ! Ah ! . . .

[*The song ceases suddenly and AGLAVAINE goes out.*

SCENE VII.—*At the top of the Tower.*

Enter SELYSETTE and little YSSALINE.

SELYSETTE.

And now the hour has come, my little Yssaline. I shall not go down to them again ; I shall not smile gently at them any more. . . How cold it is in the tower ; the wind comes from the north. See the light that it throws on the waves. . . The

flowers are hidden from sight, the voice of mankind is still, and sadness hangs over all. . . How different from this morning. . .

YSSALINE.

And where is the bird, little sister ?

SELYSETTE.

We must wait till the sun has sunk into the very depths of the sea, till the light lies dead on the horizon, for the bird is afraid of the light, and has never yet looked at the sun. . .

YSSALINE.

And if there should be any stars, little sister ?

SELYSETTE.

And if there should be any stars ? . . . [Looking at the sky.] There are no stars yet, but they are all waiting, eager to peer through the sky ; and we must hasten, for it will be more terrible still when they are there. . .

YSSALINE.

I am very cold, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

Let us sit here ; the wall will keep the wind from us, and we will wait till the last gleam of crimson shall have died away in the sea. . . How slowly the sun is sinking. . . When it is gone I will look for the bird. . . Let me wrap my white scarf about you ; I shall want it no more. . .

YSSALINE.

Why are you holding me so close to you, little sister? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Because my happiness is too much for me, Yssaline; never have I been happier than I am to-day. . . . But look well at me. . . . I am smiling, I am sure I am smiling. . . . Why do you not smile at me? . . .

YSSALINE.

You are speaking so quickly, little sister. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Am I speaking quickly? . . . I have no time to lose. . . .

YSSALINE.

And besides, you are tearing up all my flowers. . . .

SELYSETTE.

What flowers? Oh, these! . . . I was forgetting that they were yours. . . .

YSSALINE.

I will not have you cry, little sister. . . .

SELYSETTE.

But I am not crying, my little Yssaline. . . . That is the very last thing of all that any one must believe. . . . I am smiling so much that I seem to be crying. . . .

YSSALINE.

Then why do your eyes seem to be crying? . . .

SELYSETTE.

How can I tell what my eyes choose to do? . . .
But remember this well: if you tell any one that
I seemed to be sad, you will be punished for a
long, long time. . .

YSSALINE.

Why?

SELYSETTE.

You will know some day. And you must not ask me so many questions; you are only a little girl who cannot yet understand the things that are clear to others. I did not understand either when I was your age, no, not until very long after. . . I may do this or that; but it is not the things you see that matter the most. . . Look you, my little Yssaline, I must not speak of it, though I should so much like to tell some one, for it is sad to be the only one who knows. . .

YSSALINE.

I can hardly see the sun now, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

Wait, wait yet a little, Yssaline; for as the sun goes down, so does something else come nearer and the nearer it comes to me the more clearly do I see. . . I can no longer tell whether I have acted wisely in bringing you to the tower; but some one had to come with me, for they will want to know

all that took place, and they will be happy if only they do not know. . . You do not understand a word of what I am saying to you now, little sister mine. . . Yes, but a day will come when you will understand it all, when you will see all that you cannot see now that your eyes are beholding it. . . And then you will be sorrowful, nor will you ever be able to forget what you are about to see. . . But when you are a woman you will shed many tears because of this, and it may even weigh upon your life. . . And therefore I ask you to-day to forgive me, though you know not why, for the suffering that will come upon you some time when you know too well. . .

YSSALINE.

The flocks are coming back, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

They will come back to-morrow too, Yssaline.

YSSALINE.

Yes, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

And the birds will sing to-morrow. . .

YSSALINE.

Yes, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

And the flowers will open to-morrow. . .

YSSALINE.

Yes, yes, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

Why had it to be the younger of the two? . . .

YSSALINE.

There is only a little red line there now, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

You are right; it is time. . . You yourself are urging me to it; and the stars too are growing impatient. . . Farewell, Yssaline. I am very, very happy. . .

YSSALINE.

So am I, little sister. Be quick, the stars are coming. . .

SELYSETTE.

Have no fear, Yssaline; they will see me no more. . . Come, sit in this corner, and let me fasten my scarf around you, for the wind is very cold. . . Do you really love me? No, no; do not answer; I know, I know. . . I am going to roll up this big stone, so that you cannot go near the opening over which I mean to bend. . . Do not be frightened if you should not see me any more. It will only mean that I have had to go down the other side. . . Do not wait for me; go down the stone staircase by yourself. . . And, above all, do not try to see what I have done, do not go near this wall. . . You would see nothing and you would be punished. . . I shall wait for you below. . . Kiss me, Yssaline, and tell grandam. . .

YSSALINE.

What shall I tell her, little sister? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Nothing, nothing. . . . I thought I had forgotten something. . . . [She goes to the crumbling wall that faces the sea and leans over.] Oh, how deep and cold the sea looks! . . .

YSSALINE.

Little sister?

SELYSETTE.

There it is; I see it. . . . Do not move. . . .

YSSALINE.

Where is it? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Wait . . . wait . . . I must bend over a little more. . . . Yssaline! . . . Yssaline! . . . The stones are trembling! . . . I am falling! . . . Oh!

[A side of the wall gives. The sound of a fall is heard, and a low cry of pain. Then a long silence.

YSSALINE.

[Rising, in tears.] Little sister! . . . little sister! . . . Where are you? . . . I am frightened, little sister! . . .

[She bursts out sobbing, alone in the turret.

ACT FIFTH

SCENE I.—*A Corridor in the Castle.*

Enter AGLAVAIN and MELEANDER.

MELEANDER.

She has fallen asleep; but the doctors are going, and, pray as I might, I have not been able to draw a single word of hope from them. . . . She fell on to a hillock of sand, that the wind had swept to the foot of the tower, as though to receive her more tenderly. It is there that the servants found her, whilst you were hoping to meet her on the road to the village. There is no wound to be seen on her poor little body; but a stream of blood flows from her lips; and when she opened her eyes she smiled at me, but said not a word. . . .

AGLAVAIN.

But Yssaline? What does Yssaline say? They tell me she was with her. . . .

MELEANDER.

I have questioned her. . . . She was found at the top of the tower, trembling with cold and fright. . . . She repeats, over and over again, through

her tears, that the wall opened while Selysette was leaning over so as to lay hold of a bird that was passing. . . . When I met her this afternoon, here in the corridor—and it was on this very spot, between the pillars—she seemed less sad than usual. . . . “She seemed less sad than usual !” . . . Do we not both stand condemned by those words ? . . . And now, when I think of all she has said to us, of all she has done, monstrous suspicions burst upon my soul, and crush my life. . . . Love is as cruel as hate. . . . I no longer believe, I no longer believe. . . . And all my sorrow turns into loathing ! . . . Curses on the beauty that brings disaster with it ! . . . Curses on the mind that craves for too much beauty ! . . . Curses on the destiny that is blind and deaf ! . . . And I curse the words that deceive and betray, and I curse the life that will not give ear to life ! . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Meleander. . .

MELEANDER.

What do you want of me ? . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Come with me. . . . I must see her, for it is not possible. . . . We must know. . . . She cannot have done it deliberately. She cannot, for in that case. . .

MELEANDER.

In that case ?

AGLAVAINE.

We must know. . . Come. . . No matter how. . . Her suffering must have been too great before she would have done that! . . . And I would never again be able, never, never. . .

[She drags him away quickly.]

SCENE II.—*Selysette's Bedroom.*

SELYSETTE lies upon her bed. Enter AGLAVAINE and MELEANDER.

SELYSETTE.

[With a slight movement.] Is it you, Aglavaine? Is it you, Meleander?—I was wanting you both so much. I am happy now you have come. . .

MELEANDER.

[Bursting into tears as he throws himself upon the bed.] Selysette! . . .

SELYSETTE.

What is the matter? . . . You are both crying. . .

AGLAVAINE.

Selysette! Selysette! . . . What have you done? . . . Oh wretch that I am! . . .

SELYSETTE.

What is the matter, Aglavaine? . . . Why are you so distressed? . . . Have I done anything to make you unhappy? . . .

AGLAVAINE.

No, no, my poor Selysette, you do not bring unhappiness. . . It is I who bring death . . . it is I who have failed to do all that I should have done. . .

SELYSETTE.

I do not understand, Aglavaine. . . What has happened—tell me. . .

AGLAVAINE.

I ought to have known, Selysette, and I thought I did know, when I spoke to you the other day. . . For many days past something has been unceasingly crying aloud in my heart, and I found nothing, and knew nothing, of what should be done—though it needed but the simplest word that the simplest creature on earth might have spoken to save a life that only craved to live. . .

SELYSETTE.

What did you know? tell me. . .

AGLAVAINE.

When you spoke of that idea of yours, the other day, Selysette . . . and this morning, and again this afternoon, I should have held you close to me, so close that it should have fallen between us like a pressed-out grape. . . I should have plunged my two hands into your soul, and dragged forth the death that I felt was living there. . . I should have achieved something by dint of love . . . and

I knew of nothing I could do, and I looked on and was blind to it all, though I saw everything, everything! . . . The wretchedest girl of this wretched village would have found a kiss that should save life for us! . . . I have been either unutterably base or unutterably blind! . . . The first time, perhaps that I have fled from the truth like a child! . . . And I dare not look into myself. . . Forgive me, Selysette; I shall never be happy again.

SELYSETTE.

Listen to me, Aglavaine. I am very glad that you have come to me at once, for I feel that ere long my mind will wander from me. . . There is something here which presses on my eyelids. . . But whatever I may say, later on—I cannot tell what I may say—you know the strange fancies that flit across the dying. . . I was at a death-bed once, and it is my turn now. . . Well, whatever I may say later on, pay no heed. . . But at present I know what I am saying; and do you listen to that only, and recall that only, and that alone. . . Surely there lingers not a doubt within you, Aglavaine? . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Of what should I be in doubt, my poor Selysette?

SELYSETTE.

Do you imagine that . . . ?

AGLAVAINE.

Yes. . .

SELYSETTE.

That it was not by accident I fell ?

AGLAVAIN.

I know it was not, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

We are told that falsehood is impossible to those who are dying, Aglavaine, and I mean to tell you the truth. . .

AGLAVAIN.

I knew that, from the love you bore us, you would be strong enough for that. . .

SELYSETTE.

It was an accident, and I fell, Aglavaine.—Is it you who are sobbing, Meleander ?

AGLAVAIN.

Listen now to me, Selysette. . . You know that the truth is known to us. . . And if at this moment I question you, it is not from doubt of mine, but it is so that you, you, should doubt no more. . . You are very beautiful, Selysette, and I am on my knees before you. . . The thing that you have done, so simply, is the most beautiful thing whereof love is capable when love is blind. . . But now I ask you to do something more beautiful still, and I ask it in the name of a wiser love. . . Locked between your lips, there lies the perfect peace of all our life. . .

SELYSETTE.

Of what peace do you speak, Aglavaine ?

AGLAVAINE.

Of one that is deep and very sad. . .

SELYSETTE.

But how can I give it to you, Aglavaine ? There is nothing in me. . .

AGLAVAINE.

You need but tell us that you wished to die, thinking thus to make us happy. . .

SELYSETTE.

Gladly would I say this to you, Aglavaine, but it is impossible, seeing that it is untrue. . . You do not believe that one could tell an untruth on one's death-bed ? . . .

AGLAVAINE.

I beseech you, think not of death, Selysette. . . . See, I kiss you, and pour all my life into your veins, and flood your soul with the spirit of life ! . . . If death were near I could understand the telling of this falsehood. . . But death is far away, and all life is clamouring for the truth. . . Admit it, Selysette ; and do not shake your head ; speaking to each other as we are now speaking, can we possibly misunderstand ? . . .

SELYSETTE.

And none the less you are wrong, Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVAINE.

Must we weep far apart then, with thousands of miles between us? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Why will you not believe it to be true?

AGLAVAINE.

Not even a child would believe it—for there is not a word of yours, not an act, but proves the contrary. . .

SELYSETTE.

Which words and acts do you speak of? . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Why did you bid farewell to our grandmother?

SELYSETTE.

I never left the house without first bidding her good-bye. . .

AGLAVAINE.

Why. . . But why everything, Selysette? . . . Oh, the misery of questions such as these, when death is close by, and we know that the truth is there, to our hand, nestling beneath her heart! . . .

SELYSETTE.

Your doubtsadden me, Aglavaine, and I was feeling so happy . . . What can I do so that you shall doubt no more? . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Give us the truth, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

But what is the truth you desire? . . .

AGLAVAINE.

It was I who, all unwittingly, urged you to this. . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no, Aglavaine, urged was I by none. . .

AGLAVAINE.

It needs but one word to dispel the clouds from life, and on my knees do I beseech you to say this one poor word. . . Whisper it to me if you will, let your eyes make a sign to me, and even Meleander shall never know. . .

MELEANDER.

Aglavaine is right, Selysette. . . I ask it, too. . .

SELYSETTE.

I was leaning over, and I fell. . .

AGLAVAINE.

You asked me so often what I would do in your place. . .

SELYSETTE.

I was leaning over, and I fell. . .

AGLAVAINE.

Do you not know why I question you thus? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes, yes, Aglavaine mine, I can see that it would have been more beautiful, but it would not be the truth. . .

AGLAVAINE.

[*Sobbing.*] Oh, God! how poor we are before all those of simple love! . . .

SELYSETTE.

Aglavaine! . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Selysette! . . . What has happened? . . . You are turning pale. . . . Is the pain worse? . . .

SELYSETTE.

No. . . It is the joy that makes me suffer. . . Oh! how you are weeping, Meleander! . . .

MELEANDER.

Selysette! . . .

SELYSETTE.

Do not weep like this, my poor Meleander. . . . Now indeed do we love each other. . . . There is no need for tears. . . . Soon I shall be dead, and there will be so glad a smile on my lips that you will scarce believe I can be dead, so happy shall I seem. . . . What? You crying too, Aglavaine? Is it not happiness, then?

AGLAVAINE.

Give us the perfect peace, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I will give you the peace you gave me, Aglavaine. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

You could give it, but you will not. . . .

SELYSETTE.

And yet is there such great peace within me, Aglavaine. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

[*Sobbing.*] God Himself were wrong before you, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE.

[*With a change in her voice.*] But why are you going, said my grandam to me, why go away, my child? Because of a key I have found, grandam, because of a key I have found. . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Selysette! . . .

SELYSETTE.

[Coming to herself.] Yssaline! . . . What was I saying? . . . Tell me what I said . . . it is not true . . . I warned you. . .

AGLAVAINE.

You said nothing, nothing. . . . Do not torment yourself, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

I warned you. . . I may perhaps be saying things soon, but they will not be true. . . You will forgive me, for my soul is growing so weak. . . Did I speak of grandam? . . .

AGLAVAINE.

Yes. . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes, I wanted to tell you. . . You must raise her without touching her arms. . . . I would have taught you, but time, time would not allow. Oh! Aglavaine, be careful! . . .

AGLAVAINE.

[Alarmed.] What is it, what is it, Selysette? . .

SELYSETTE.

Nothing, nothing; it is going. . . I thought I was about to say things that were not true. . .

AGLAVAINE.

I will not seek for the truth any more, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

Put your hand over my mouth when I say things that are untrue. . . Promise, promise, I beseech you. . .

AGLAVAINE.

I promise, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE [*to Meleander*].

I have something to say to her, Meleander. . . [MELEANDER goes away silently.] He is sad, he is sad. . . You will tell him some day, by-and-by, when he has forgotten . . . put your hand on my lips, Aglavaine, a sudden pain has come to me. . .

AGLAVAINE.

Tell me, tell me, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

I have forgotten what I had to say. . . It was not truth, but falsehood, that was coming. . . Put your hand over my eyes, too. . . It is well that they should be closed by you who opened them. . . It is true; it is true.

AGLAVAINE.

Selysette! . . .

SELYSETTE.

[*Very faintly.*] I was . . . I was leaning over,
and I fell. . .

[*She dies.*

AGLAVAINE.

[*With a sob.*] Meleander. . .

MELEANDER.

[*Falls, sobbing, on to SELYSETTE's body.*] Sely-
sette! . . .

THE END

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